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Incorporating Nonfiction into the Primary Grades: A Handbook for K-2 Teachers

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INCORPORATING NONFICTION INTO
THE PRIMARY GRADES:
A HANDBOOK FOR K-2 TEACHERS

A Project Report
Presented to
The Graduate Faculty
Central Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Education
Reading Specialist

By
Mandee D. Burton
May 2006

EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY CENTER
CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
ABSTRACT

INCORPORATING NONFICTION INTO
THE PRIMARY GRADES:
A HANDBOOK FOR K-2 TEACHERS

By
Mandee D. Burton
May, 2006

The majority of reading done outside the school setting is primarily nonfiction in nature; however primary teachers continue to emphasize fictional texts in the classroom. Therefore, many students are unprepared for the increase in the use of nonfiction text which begins in the intermediate grades and continues on up through the college years. Students as young as kindergarten benefit from the early exposure to nonfiction in numerous ways including increased background knowledge, vocabulary, and comprehension. A handbook was created to assist teachers (K-2) in incorporating nonfiction into the primary grades. Eight strategies effective in improving students' comprehension of nonfiction as well as suggestions for selecting and locating quality nonfiction are included.
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CHAPTER ONE

Background of the Project

Introduction

Researchers suggest that as much as 90 percent of the reading done in elementary school is narrative, leaving only ten percent for the remaining genres, including nonfiction (Caswell & Duke, 1998; Dreher, 1998). Yet, nonfiction is the genre students will most likely encounter outside of the school setting, which creates an apparent discord in today's educational system. Some scholars maintain that students in the primary grades should focus their attention on learning to read, reserving reading to learn for the older, more advanced readers. However, many students often experience a significant decrease in reading achievement when they reach the intermediate grades (grades 3, 4, and 5) as a result of the increased demand and limited prior experience with nonfiction texts, often referred to as the fourth grade slump. Many scholars suggest that primary teachers can play a critical role in addressing the issue of poor expository reading achievement by incorporating a variety of genres, including nonfiction, into the primary grade classrooms (K-2). When teachers make a conscious effort to include nonfiction into their daily routines, students are better prepared for the literacy demands they may encounter (Caswell & Duke, 1998; Guilliame, 1998; Moss, Leone & Dipillo, 1997; Sanacore, 1991).

Primary students often welcome the nonfiction genre into their literature repertoire as it satisfies many of their curiosities and wonders of the world. Young minds have a fascination for facts in their quest to discover knowledge about the world. In fact, after giving students opportunities to experience and interact with nonfiction text,
researchers found that some children actually prefer expository text over narrative (Caswell & Duke, 1998; Pappas, 1993). In addition, incorporating nonfiction in the primary grades provides students with opportunities to build background knowledge, as well as strengthen vocabulary acquisition and comprehension (Benjamin & Moynihan, 2005; McMath, King & Smith, 1998; Moss, 1995).

Though the call to use nonfiction text in the primary grades is relatively new, there are many strategies designed to assist students as young as kindergarten in comprehending this genre. The eight nonfiction strategies discussed in detail for this project include (a) interactive read-alouds, (b) Venn diagrams, (c) K-W-L charts, (d) anticipation guides, (e) reciprocal teaching techniques, (f) questioning the author techniques, (g) sketch to stretch activities, and (h) the experience-text-relationship technique.

Purpose of the Project

The first purpose of this project is to create a handbook that provides primary teachers with practical strategies for incorporating age-appropriate nonfiction into the classroom. The handbook includes detailed lesson plans involving strategies designed to improve primary students' comprehension of nonfiction text. The handbook will also provide the teacher with valuable resources in choosing “quality” nonfiction and locating specific nonfiction titles. Finally, a list of recommended nonfiction books and authors is included.

The second purpose of this project is to provide primary students with opportunities to engage in informational text so that they will be better prepared to meet the literacy demands of the future. Furthermore, actively engaging students in
nonfiction text often leads to improved background knowledge, vocabulary, and comprehension (Benjamin & Moynihan, 2005; McMath et al., 1998; Moss, 1995).

Significance of the Project

We live in an information society with the latest facts and figures available at the click of a button. In fact, Harvey and Goudvis (2000) estimate that about 80 percent of the reading done outside the classroom is nonfiction in nature. However, as much as 90 percent of the reading done in elementary classrooms is fictional (Caswell & Duke, 1998; Dreher, 1998). To examine the amount of informational text used in the primary grades, Duke (2000) conducted a study and found that an average of only 3.6 minutes a day were spent on nonfiction texts. Consequently, there is an evident need to prepare young children for the informational reading required of them outside the school setting by incorporating more nonfiction into the primary grade classrooms.

The author of this project works for the West Valley School District at Mountainview Elementary, a small school west of Yakima. As part of the school’s “Student Achievement Plan,” the staff analyzes the previous year’s Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) scores at the fourth grade level and plans strategies for improvement. As each item is analyzed in the reading section of the WASL, it becomes evident that students struggle with expository reading more than the narrative. The 2005 WASL scores for Mountainview Elementary revealed that 80 percent of the students tested met the reading standard on texts involving narrative passages, whereas only 67 percent of the students met the standard on texts containing nonfiction passages. The author of this project believes that by purposefully engaging primary (K-2) students in nonfiction texts, they will be better prepared to meet the
increased expository demands often found in the intermediate grades and continuing on up through college.

*Limitations of the Project*

Although nonfiction reading strategies can be utilized in all grade levels, the teacher handbook is specifically designed for teachers in the primary grades. With appropriate adaptations, many of the strategies discussed in this handbook can be used to meet the needs of intermediate and middle school students as well. In addition, many of the trade books suggested in the handbook specifically focus on the interests and reading levels of primary students.

Since incorporating nonfiction in the primary grades is a relatively new topic, the author of this project was unable to locate information that specifically relates to using nonfiction with students with special needs or English-language learners. However, the literature reviewed for this project indicates that exposing children to a variety of genres starting at a young age can be very beneficial to all students.

*Definitions of Terms*

In an effort to help readers to better understand the material presented in this project, the following terms have been defined:

*Nonfiction.* “Prose designed primarily to explain, argue, or describe rather than to entertain; specifically, a type of prose other than fiction but including biography and autobiography. Nonfiction can also be referred to as expository text, informational text, or non-narrative text” (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p.165).

*Fiction.* “Imaginative narrative in any form of presentation that is designed to entertain, as distinguished from that which is designed primarily to explain, argue, or
merely describe; specifically, a type of literature, especially prose, as novels and short stories. Fiction can also be referred to as narrative text or story” (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 83).

_Read-Aloud._ A read-aloud is an activity in which the teacher or other adult reads a selected text aloud to children (Smolkin & Donovan, 2001).

_**Fourth Grade Slump.**_ The fourth grade slump is a drop in reading achievement at about the fourth grade level. Some contend that it is due in part to the increased demand for expository reading and writing. The fourth grade slump and “the expository gap” are used interchangeably (Duke, 2000).

_Genre._ “a category used to classify literary works, usually by form, technique, or content” (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 94-95).

_Trade Book._ A trade book is a book published for sale to the general public. They include commercial books other than basal readers that can be used for reading instruction (Armbruster, 1991).

_Twin Texts._ Twin texts are paired texts on the same topic, one fiction and one nonfiction in form. Twin texts may also be referred to as paired texts or Pair-It books (Soalt, 2005).

_Scaffolding._ “in learning, the gradual withdrawal of adult support, as through instruction, modeling, questioning, feedback, etc., for a child’s performance across successive engagements, thus transferring more autonomy to the child” (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 226).

_Strategy._ “in education, a systematic plan, consciously adapted and monitored, to improve one’s performance in learning” (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 244).
CHAPTER TWO
Review of Related Literature

Introduction

Teachers from around the world know the importance of providing a balance of different genres in order to improve the literacy abilities of their students and prepare them for the ever increasing "information age." However, many teachers continue to teach reading and writing using mostly fictional text, giving very little attention to the nonfiction or informational genre. This is not only a concern of teachers at the middle and secondary levels; but more than ever before, primary grade teachers are experiencing the need to incorporate a variety of genres, including informational text, in an effort to improve their students' reading and writing abilities. The issue of using nonfiction in the primary grades is relatively new for reading researchers. However, in the past ten to fifteen years, research on this topic has increased tremendously. Nonfiction has also been identified by key terms such as "informational text," "expository text," and "non-narrative text," and the terms are used interchangeably by most researchers in the reading field.

Though the majority of researchers studying the topic of nonfiction promote a greater use of this genre in primary classrooms, it is imperative to know these researchers are not suggesting the removal of fictional text. Instead, their primary goal is to provide students with more opportunities to be exposed to a greater variety of genres, including nonfiction (Duke, 2000; Pappas, 1991; Sanacore, 1991).

This review of the literature will include the following topics: (a) what is nonfiction?, (b) the scarcity of nonfiction in the primary grades, (c) the case for
nonfiction in the primary grades, (d) the benefits of using nonfiction, (e) choosing quality nonfiction, (f) nonfiction read-alouds, (g) strategies for incorporating nonfiction, and (h) textbooks and trade books.

What is Nonfiction?

Nonfiction texts are texts that offer information and facts about the real world and often relate them to larger concepts. The authors' main purpose in nonfiction is to inform, whereas the purpose of fiction is generally to entertain (Taberski, 1999). Informational texts may often be found in the form of trade books, magazines, textbooks, charts, posters, and reference materials. Taberski (1999) recommends that children have the opportunity, starting at a young age, to experience the valuable features offered in nonfiction including glossaries, table of contents, indexes, captions, diagrams, photographs, maps, and subheadings. In addition, researchers who have studied the topic of informational text note other common characteristics unique to this genre including (a) generic nouns (e.g. "a fox" or "parrots" rather than "the red fox" or "Polly, the parrot"), (b) present tense verbs, (c) technical or specialized vocabulary, (d) generalized statements at the beginning and ending of a book, and (e) repetition of a specific theme (Pappas, 1993; Pappas & Pettegrew, 1998; Yopp & Yopp, 2000). Lastly, nonfiction authors tend to use descriptive, persuasive, or comparative writing styles which may not be familiar to young readers if they have had limited exposure to this genre (Moss, 2004; Walker, Kragler, Martin & Arnett, 2003).

There are three major categories of nonfiction which include narrative nonfiction, informational poetry, and non-narrative informational text (Duke, 2000). The primary purpose of narrative nonfiction is to inform, but it is written in a narrative form.
Narrative nonfiction can serve as an effective transition between fictional and expository text as it includes features of both. The second category of nonfiction is the informational poetry which includes poetry specifically written to inform the reader about a particular topic. Meanwhile, the non-narrative informational category is reserved for texts designed to provide information alone.

The Scarcity of Nonfiction in the Primary Grades

In a book called Strategies That Work, authors Harvey and Goudvis (2000) estimate that about 80 percent of the reading done outside the school setting is nonfiction in nature. In addition, Snowball (1995) estimates that about 85 percent of the reading at the middle school level and on into adulthood is nonfiction. Yet, students in the primary grades are receiving very little exposure or instruction with nonfiction text, which creates an apparent disconnect. In fact, it is suggested that as much as 90 percent of the reading done by children at the elementary school level is narrative in form, leaving only ten percent for the remaining genres, including nonfiction (Caswell & Duke, 1998; Dreher, 1998). Furthermore, after examining standardized tests, Daniels (2002) states that about 70 to 80 percent of the reading required on standardized tests is expository. Therefore, he explains that this testing is inappropriate for students who have not had adequate exposure and practice with this genre.

One of the reasons for the limited use of nonfiction in the primary grades stems from the longstanding view that informational texts are too difficult for young children to fully comprehend. In a book, titled Primary Understanding: Education in Early Childhood (as cited in Palmer & Stewart, 2003; Pappas, 1993), Egan explains that young children can comprehend narrative text much easier than expository; therefore they
should master the narrative before moving to the expository realm. He also contends that students must first “learn to read” before they can “read to learn” which involves an increase in the use of nonfiction texts. Ultimately, Egan promotes the idea that learning to read different genres is developmental in which one must master one genre before moving to another.

Researchers do not deny the fact that primary grade students may initially have difficulty with reading and comprehending nonfiction text. A number of factors may account for this difficulty. The most significant factor may be the lack of early exposure to nonfiction texts; instead the emphasis in the early grades is usually on fictional text (Guilluame, 1998; Moss, 2004; Richgels, 2002). In addition, most children have not been taught how nonfiction texts work. With younger students, this is often accomplished by read-alouds in which the teacher or other adult models various expository elements to the students (Moss, 2004; Olson & Gee, 1991). Another factor that may account for students' initial difficulty with nonfiction is the lack of quality nonfiction published for younger readers. Until recently, most of the nonfiction trade books published were targeted for older audiences, thus they were difficult for the younger readers to read (Moss, 1995). Finally, Olson and Gee explain that the limited background knowledge of many primary students may make it difficult for them to make sense of new information presented to them.

Recently, Palmer and Stewart (2003) participated in a yearlong, qualitative study to explore why nonfiction is rarely used with younger students and strategies that teachers who were using nonfiction employed in the classroom to assist children in understanding this genre more completely. Researchers studied 31 first, second, and
third-grade students and their nine teachers in a school located in the Pacific Northwest. The teachers chosen for the study said that they all used nonfiction to some extent in the classroom during thematic units. Palmer and Stewart visited the classrooms on numerous occasions during “Drop Everything and Read” (DEAR), an independent reading time, informally interviewing students on why they selected a particular book. In addition, researchers interviewed the nine teachers as to how and why they use nonfiction in the classroom. Also, students’ book choices during library check out were observed and recorded.

After analyzing their data, these researchers found three common themes concerning the use of nonfiction in the primary grades. First, Palmer and Stewart determined that the majority of nonfiction books available to the children were at inappropriate reading levels, so often times the students would simply look through the pictures in the book. Second, because much of the nonfiction used was too difficult for most of the children, the students relied on the teachers to interpret the meaning of the text, omitting the necessary details to fully understand the concept. And third, the researchers noticed that many of the informational books available to the children had a heavy concept load, which decreased students’ overall comprehension when trying to make sense of the book on their own. Yet, during one observation of students’ book choices in the library, 63 percent of the students chose informational books. When interviewed, students who chose nonfiction books said that they were intrigued by a particular subject or that they wanted to find out about something. In their conclusion, Palmer and Stewart emphasized that in order to increase nonfiction usage in the primary
classrooms, teachers need to have access to the appropriate professional development and age-appropriate, quality nonfiction books available on the market.

In 1997, a quantitative study was conducted to determine teachers' awareness of content area reading strategies referring to strategies used to comprehend nonfiction and the extent to which they were being implemented in the elementary classrooms (Howe, Grierson & Richmond, 1997). Sixty-eight first, second and third grade teachers from two different school districts in the Southeast completed the Content Area Questionnaire which was designed by the authors of this study. The questionnaire consisted of 44 reading-related strategies identified from a review of the literature. Teachers were asked to rate their familiarity with and the usage of each of the 44 different strategies. Based on the results, researchers determined that even though teachers were implementing many of the general, more basic reading strategies, they seemed to be unfamiliar with many of the strategies specific to content area teaching.

Factors that positively influenced teachers' usage of the content area reading strategies in this study included teaching the same grade level for an extended period of time and attending content area workshops. Interestingly, they also noticed that teachers with five years of experience or less were more familiar with strategies for expository texts, probably due to the fact that most of the newer teachers have recently taken a college course on content reading. After reviewing the findings of their study, researchers suggest there is a critical need for content area professional development in the elementary schools, especially at the primary level.

In an effort to determine the extent to which primary classrooms were being exposed to nonfiction texts, Duke (2000) conducted an observational study. Duke
observed 20 first-grade classrooms from ten different school districts in the Boston area; ten classrooms were considered to have a high socioeconomic status, while the other ten represented a very low socioeconomic status. Duke and her assistant observed each classroom for four full days throughout the course of the school year. They collected data about the types of texts in the classroom library, the text displayed on the walls, and the text used during reading and writing activities.

At the end of the study, Duke and her assistant found less than ten percent of the text in classroom libraries and displayed on the walls to be informational in content, particularly so in the low socioeconomic classrooms. In addition, it was found that students in this study were only spending a mean of 3.6 minutes each day on activities involving the reading and writing of informational text during the four observational days. Moreover, the ten schools from the lower socioeconomic backgrounds spent a mean of 1.9 minutes a day using nonfiction, some not using a single minute each day. Duke was surprised by the limited use of nonfiction in the primary grades and strongly urges teachers to provide students early exposure to a variety of nonfiction in order to prepare them for the increasing content demands encountered later in school.

In his book, Daniels (as cited in Moss et al., 1997) sums up the scarcity of nonfiction when he expresses the curriculum that students frequently encounter in many American schools as they progress through the grades: “Story, story, story, story, story, story, story, story, story, story, term paper” (p. 419). It is increasingly evident that primary grade students lack the much needed experience with expository text due in part to the overemphasis of story.
The Case for Nonfiction in the Primary Grades

Researchers have a number of reasons explaining why nonfiction should be used more frequently in the early grades. Some contend that younger children are intrigued by the information provided in expository text, and sometimes they even prefer nonfiction over narrative text (Guillaume, 1998; Pappas, 1993). Others maintain that even though narrative text often dominates at the primary level, children need to be exposed to a wide variety of genres, including expository reading and writing (Caswell & Duke, 1999; Duke, 2000; Guillaume, 1998; Moss et al., 1997; Pappas, 1991; Sanacore, 1991). And still others suggest that the fourth grade slump or expository gap would decrease if students had the opportunity to experience a variety of nonfiction from the start of formal schooling, rather than waiting until about the third or fourth grade (Duke, 2000; Duke & Kays, 1998; Pappas, 1991). Furthermore, Pappas (1991) expresses that the over reliance of story may actually prevent students from acquiring a well developed book knowledge needed to become fully literate in today’s society.

Pappas, in a 1993 landmark study, discredited Egan’s assumption that narrative texts are the best genre for primary children and that expository texts are not developmentally appropriate for younger learners. She observed 20 kindergarteners’ repeated “pretend readings” or retellings of four books, two from the fictional genre and two from the expository genre. Pappas conducted a session with each student individually in October and then again in January. At each session, she read one fiction book and one nonfiction book to each child. The same books were then repeated so that Pappas could note the changes in students' retellings. After each reading, the child presented his/her pretend reading of the book. As the books were repeated, the students’
retellings of both genres more closely represented that of the actual text. In addition, the children began to recognize the use of present tense verbs common to most nonfiction texts and the past tense verbs in fictional stories as was observed in their retellings.

There was a definite distinction between the retellings of the fiction and the retellings of the nonfiction books. Pappas concludes that kindergarteners are just as successful with making meaning out of informational text as they are with stories. Moreover, when asked which book they preferred at each session, a greater number of students chose the nonfiction book over the fiction book. In fact, 65 percent of the students chose the nonfiction book in the October session, and 75 percent chose the nonfiction book in the January session.

In a related study confirming that young children are able to interact successfully with expository text, Duke and Kays (1998) explored kindergarteners’ knowledge of the expository genre. They observed the 20 predominantly low income kindergarteners from a large city in New England before and after they were given three months of repeated exposure to informational books. Before this exposure, the students’ “pretend readings” of a wordless information book sounded much like a narrative text. However, after three months of the teacher incorporating informational books into her daily read-alouds, students began to identify various features of the nonfiction genre such as present tense verbs and generic nouns, and as a result their retellings more closely resembled that of an informational text. Over the course of this three-month study, researchers observed the kindergarteners independently selecting nonfiction books during “choice” times and repeatedly asking the teacher to read aloud various informational books that sparked their
curiosities. In addition, student initiated journal entries contained an increased amount of nonfiction content.

In yet another study of 21 kindergarteners designed to explore whether or not young children are capable of understanding nonfiction text, Richgels (2002) observed a classroom in a rural, Midwest community for one full school year. In this classroom, nonfiction texts were used in conjunction with fictional texts on a regular basis as part of various thematic units. After analyzing many samples of students’ written work and his observational notes over the course of the year, Richgels determined that these kindergarten students were capable of distinguishing fact from fiction in the materials used for each unit. In addition, students attempted to use the nonfiction selections to help in solving problems or finding answers to questions they had about a certain topic. Finally, Richgels noticed that these students were beginning to independently use nonfiction features in their written works such as journal entries and writing centers.

In a case study conducted in Finland, Korkeamaki, Tiainen, and Dreher (1998) explored whether or not second grade students could independently construct meaning out of informational text in order to write a report. In Finland, science and social studies are typically taught during thematic units using encyclopedias, textbooks, and a small number of informational trade books. The thematic units are often culminated by having students write a report related to the theme of the unit. Initially, many students copied information for their reports word for word out of the reference materials available to them, lacking the ability to explain or expand on the information included in their report. For four months the teacher informally modeled strategies for finding and locating information, along with effective note-taking practices. After this period of scaffolding,
the second graders were asked to write another report on an animal of their choice. After analyzing the content of the students' reports, researchers found that most students were beginning to make sense of the informational text and transfer it into their own words, rather than resorting to copying the information as before. As a result, these researchers contend that second graders are able to comprehend and organize informational text when given proper scaffolding.

The previous studies reveal that primary students do have the capabilities to make sense of and apply information found in expository text. The next study suggests how some students may be more successful at nonfiction. Caswell and Duke (1998) explain that nonfiction can provide a “way in” to literacy for many struggling and reluctant readers, often suffering from a poor self-esteem. While working as educators at the Harvard Literacy Laboratory, a support center for low income students having difficulties with reading and writing, Caswell and Duke had the opportunity to observe two young boys over the course of two years. One of the boys was in first grade and was challenged with a severe learning disability; the other boy was a bilingual Capeverdean Creole in the fourth grade. Both boys were considered to be a year or more behind their grade level peers according to various tests administered by both the school and the lab. The boys reading experiences at school were overwhelmingly narrative.

During their time at the lab, Caswell and Duke discovered that these two boys' interests lay in learning new information and figuring out answers to questions regarding the world around them. Capitalizing on their interest in nonfiction, Caswell and Duke decided to include nonfiction into their personal curriculum. The boys performed better on the nonfiction text in part because it piqued their interests and satisfied their curiosities.
about the world, and because of this their attitudes toward reading quickly became more positive. Within months, the boys were able to transfer their basic reading skills to narrative texts as well. Caswell and Duke maintain that because they were able to capitalize on the boys' interests and genre preferences, both boys made considerable progress in their literacy development and are reading at grade level.

As in the previous study, many students, especially boys, not only enjoy reading nonfiction texts but often prefer it (Asselin, 2003; Asher & Markell, 1974; Caswell & Duke, 1998; Langerman, 1990; Pappas, 1993). A study was done to investigate whether gender differences impacted students' interest levels in reading material. Results indicate that boys were most interested in informational books about sports, science, and animals; whereas the girls were more interested in fictional books about family, relationships, and everyday problems (Asher & Markell, 1974). In her article on boys' book selections, Langerman (1990) suggests that boys may be at a disadvantage in many fiction dominated classrooms because of the limited exposure to nonfiction which often interests them the most. More importantly, when students are genuinely interested in reading, they tend to invest a greater amount of time and effort into the activity.

Yet another reason for using nonfiction in the primary grades is discussed in an article about the role of genre in the classroom. Pappas and Pettekrew (1998) examine Ken Goodman's belief that reading is a “psycholinguistic guessing game,” meaning that the reader takes in all the clues from the text to make informed guesses about the meaning. However, the authors suggest that the role of genre was not taken into consideration in Goodman's psycholinguistic guessing game model 30 years ago. Pappas and Pettekrew explain that recognizing text structures and elements of the different
genres can also provide additional support when attempting to make meaning of a text. Therefore, the authors see the need once again for students to be exposed to a variety of genres, starting at an early age in order to make more informed guesses when constructing meaning.

In response to whether or not primary students should be exposed to nonfiction texts, Guillaume (1998) writes, “Content area reading is not the sole territory of those who are already proficient readers. Teachers of children of all ages have the important job of helping learners interact with text to produce meaning” (p. 476). Guillaume explains that reading to learn should not be reserved for the older readers, as it is just as important for younger readers to experience informational text as it is for older readers. In addition, numerous experts in this field suggest that readers in the primary grades need many experiences with a variety of texts in order to fully develop higher level reading skills (Caswell & Duke, 1998; Moss et al., 1997; Olson & Gee, 1991; Sanacore, 1991).

The Benefits of Using Nonfiction in the Primary Grades

Most individuals noted for their work in the field of nonfiction reading possess numerous beliefs on the benefits of incorporating informational text into the primary grades. Based on the review of literature, some of the most common reasons for increasing the use of nonfiction in the primary grades are expressed below.

The inclusion of nonfiction at an early age can better prepare students for future reading experiences, which may be overwhelmingly expository in nature. It is at this point when many children are expected to systematically shift from learning to read to reading to learn and often experience the fourth grade slump or expository gap. If students had continuous opportunities to use and explore nonfiction from the start of
schooling, perhaps this gap would decrease (Duke, 2000; Duke & Kays, 1998; Guillaume, 1998; Pappas, 1993). In addition, the 1992 National Assessment of Educational Progress studied the highest and lowest achieving schools in our nation based on fourth grade standardized test scores and found that the highest third achieving schools indicated reading more nonfiction than did the students in the lowest third achieving schools (Campbell, Kapinus & Beatty, as cited in Dreher, 1998).

Nonfiction can provide students a “way in” to literacy whereas other genres have failed to capture their attention and inspire motivation. When given the choice, some students actually prefer to read an expository text rather than a narrative text (Caswell & Duke, 1998; Duke & Kays, 1998; Pappas, 1993).

Nonfiction satisfies the curiosities of many young minds, answering questions they may have about the world. In addition, children may encounter new questions or problems, thus creating a purpose for them to further their reading in a quest to find answers and solve their problems. When the purpose of reading is to find answers to their own questions, children are often more motivated to read and engage in the activity for a longer period of time (Benjamin & Moynihan, 2005; McMath et al., 1998; Sanacore, 1991; Yopp & Yopp, 2000).

Incorporating nonfiction into the primary classrooms may add to students’ overall literacy proficiency. When students are competent in a variety of genres, they become more fully literate and prepared for the reading demands they may encounter (Duke & Bennett-Armistead, 2003; Pappas & Pettegrew, 1998). Pappas (1991) expresses the same idea when she states, “Exclusive use of stories, thus may end up being a barrier to full
access to literacy. Children need opportunities to use books from a range of genres” (p. 461).

Finally, reading nonfiction builds students’ knowledge bases about the world and provides an introduction to unfamiliar concepts. Reading informational books gives students the opportunity to explore the world around them through text, as many will never really climb Mt. Everest or visit the Egyptian Pyramids. This increased background knowledge of the world typically leads to increased vocabulary development and comprehension as well (Benjamin & Moynihan, 2005; McMath et al., 1998; Moss, 1995).

Choosing “Quality” Nonfiction

Many teachers are aware of the benefits of using nonfiction; however choosing quality nonfiction to meet the needs of younger readers can often be a daunting process. In the past, nonfiction titles were limited, especially for readers in the primary grades. Currently, hundreds of nonfiction books are published each year, which makes it even more important to know how to select the most effective books. Listed below are guidelines that have been recommended for selecting quality nonfiction.

1. Authority of the author. Check the authority of the author and determine if the author is qualified to write a book on that particular topic. Sometimes the author dedicates a section of the book to discuss the research involved prior to writing the book (Moss, 1995).

2. Accuracy. The accuracy of the text should be taken into consideration to ensure the facts remain true in our current society. New facts and information
arise on a regular basis due in part to computers and other advancements in technology (Sudol & King, 1996; Moss, 1995; Moss, 2004).

3. Accessibility. It is necessary to make sure that books are at the appropriate reading level for their intended audience. Furthermore, select books that don’t overwhelm children by the amount of technical vocabulary included in the text (Sudol & King, 1996).

4. Appropriateness. Choose books that are age-appropriate and have relevance to children’s lives. It is important to incorporate texts that are meaningful to children. For example, teachers probably would not read a book aloud about the Japanese Holocaust to kindergarteners, as the content is not appropriate for young students (Moss, 1995; Moss, 2004; Sudol & King, 1996).

5. Appeal. When choosing a nonfiction book for children, it is critical to choose a book with an appealing appearance. Many students select a book based on their perceptions of the cover and illustrations (Moss, 1995; Sudol & King, 1996).

6. Text type. Select the type of text that matches the interest and ability levels of the students. For some students, a magazine article may be the most effective way to communicate information on a certain topic, and for others it may be locating information on the Web, yet others find books as the most valuable tool for learning new information (Sudol & King, 1996).

7. Recommendations. Ask colleagues for recommendations of nonfiction titles that have been successful in their teaching experiences. In addition, ask students to name nonfiction books that were particularly interesting or helpful.
to them. While some suggest reading online reviews of books or searching the Web for titles that have received awards in categories specific to nonfiction (Sudol & King, 1996).

**Nonfiction Read-Alouds**

One way for teachers to engage their students in expository text at an early age is to read informational books aloud with children. In an article discussing informational text, Moss (1995) gives four reasons for using nonfiction read-alouds in the classroom. First, Moss explains that this exposure to nonfiction in a non-threatening environment broadens students' knowledge on a wide range of topics. This increased background knowledge often leads to a more developed vocabulary and comprehension. Second, Moss contends that reading nonfiction aloud will heighten children's awareness of the patterns and features unique to nonfiction text. Next, she asserts that nonfiction read-alouds can serve as excellent tie-ins to content area subjects, such as math, science, and social studies. Finally, Moss explains that reading nonfiction aloud to students can spark their curiosities and empower them to want to read more to find answers and solve problems. In fact, students often choose to read the books teachers have shared with them, rather than books that are unfamiliar (Sanacore, 1991).

In 1996, Oyler and Barry explored the idea of interactive nonfiction read-alouds in a first grade classroom located in Chicago. Barry, the classroom teacher, encouraged her 24 students to interject their comments during read-alouds in order to gain a better insight on the connections students were making during reading. Allowing students to interrupt was a new idea for Barry, and it took some effort to share the control. But in the end, she admits it was well worth it. Students expressed connections they made to other
texts, other people or places, and their own personal lives during the read-alouds. Oyler observed the interactions during the sessions and together they interpreted the data gathered during the read-aloud sessions. Both Oyler and Barry were surprised by the frequency and depth of the students’ connections. By allowing students to share their connections aloud, the authors claim that the students were able to build “intertextuality among a community of readers” (p. 328). Furthermore, Oyler and Barry state that these connections assist students in developing well-rounded literacy skills needed in today’s society.

Another case study was conducted on nonfiction read-alouds and the effects on comprehension (Smolkin & Donovan, 2001). Smolkin and Donovan observed a first grade teacher and her students’ interactions during read-alouds. During these read-alouds, the teacher used a transactional approach with her first grade students, allowing for pertinent discussion throughout the read-alouds. The teacher modeled various reading comprehension strategies in an informal, non-instructive manner while reading aloud to the children. She did not name the strategies or directly tell students when or how to use them. These researchers found that the transactional read-aloud sessions and teacher modeling fostered students in acquiring basic comprehension strategies necessary for making meaning from the text. In fact, some of the students even started using the strategies on their own.

These first grade students were actively engaged in the read-alouds and tried to make meaning of the text presented to them. During the study, students offered 395 interactions during the read-alouds. Seventy percent of these connections were made during the informational book read-alouds, whereas 30 percent were made during the
fictional book read-alouds. This study has convinced Smolkin and Donovan that when young students are appropriately supported, they can and do make meaning from nonfiction text.

One way to incorporate nonfiction into classroom read-alouds is to pair a nonfiction book with a narrative one on the same topic. This format is also referred to as twin texts or paired texts (Camp, 2000; Moss, 1995; Soalt, 2005; Taberski, 2001; Yopp & Yopp, 2000). Soalt (2005) contends that pairing an informational book with a fictional one helps children build background, vocabulary, and motivation, which all lead to improved comprehension. When pairing the texts together, teachers can choose to read either the fiction or the nonfiction book first, depending on the purpose for their reading. By reading the informational text first, students are often supported by the background and vocabulary needed to fully understand the narrative text. Whereas Camp (2000) suggests that reading the fictional book first can serve as an introduction to a topic, followed by the use of a nonfiction book for in-depth information. When students are given the opportunity to continually move between the genres, they tend to become more diversified readers.

Strategies for Incorporating Nonfiction

Current research reveals the need for increased usage of expository text in the primary classrooms. However, Moss (2004) indicates that it is not sufficient to simply increase the number of expository books available, but students also need to be taught strategies in order to fully comprehend the text. In fact, Pressley and Harris (1990) maintain that children do not learn comprehension strategies automatically. One way to teach comprehension strategies necessary for understanding nonfiction text is to “show”
the children how nonfiction texts work and highlight the differences between nonfiction and other genres by informally modeling and discussing the various elements of nonfiction (Moss et al., 1997).

A large amount of research has been done on strategies used to incorporate nonfiction into the elementary classrooms. Many of these strategies can be used for both narrative and nonfiction text. Compiled from a review of literature on nonfiction in the primary grades, the following contains a list of eight strategies used in elementary classrooms to increase student comprehension and to promote engaged reading among students. Though these strategies work especially well with nonfiction, they can also be used with narrative texts as well.

**Interactive Read-Alouds**

A strategy designed to build background knowledge and increase comprehension is the interactive read-aloud (Oyler & Barry, 1996; Sanacore, 1991; Smolkin & Donovan, 2002). Interactive read-alouds are often used with younger students, but can be just as effective with older students as well. The goal of an interactive read-aloud is to get students to think in-depth about the text and to make connections based on information presented. The teacher starts by choosing a read-aloud based on the curriculum or students' interests. While the teacher reads the book aloud, students are encouraged to interject connections they have made with the concepts from the text. Students often connect the concepts from the book to other texts, other people and places, or to their own personal experiences. In addition, the teacher frequently models how to use various text features and articulates her thought processes during reading. By reading
informational books aloud, students often benefit by gaining a more developed
knowledge base, which often results in improved comprehension.

In an effort to incorporate more nonfiction text into the primary grades, it has
been suggested that teachers use paired fiction and nonfiction books on the same topic for
their classroom read-alouds (Camp, 2000; Moss, 1995; Sool, 2005; Taberski, 2001;
Yopp & Yopp, 2000). This format enables children to compare different genres and
distinguish fact from fiction in an informal manner.

One variation to the interactive read-aloud is to invite a guest reader to the class,
perhaps an expert on the topic at hand (Duke & Bennett-Armistead, 2003). For example,
a teacher may want to invite a beekeeper to come in and read a book about bees so that he
can provide additional information based on his experience, deepening students’ overall
understanding of the topic.

**Venn Diagrams**

Venn diagrams are used to compare and contrast two topics and are created by
making two large, overlapping circles (Camp, 2000; Tompkins, 1998). When using Venn
diagrams in the classroom, the teacher starts by asking students a key question to
establish the focus. For example, the teacher may ask, “How are George Washington and
Abraham Lincoln similar?” Or “How are they different?” At this point, the teacher
labels the Venn diagram by labeling the first circle with one topic (George Washington),
the second circle with another topic (Abraham Lincoln), and the overlapping section with
the word “both” for commonalities between the two topics. After labeling the Venn
diagram with students, the focus question is usually reiterated before reading about the
two topics. After reading and discussing the text, students come up to the Venn diagram
and write or draw pictures indicating differences between the two topics, followed by similarities in the overlapping section. Finally, students summarize either orally or in written form the information represented on their Venn diagram.

Venn diagrams are especially effective because they provide students with a purpose for reading, which helps students to carefully analyze and think about the information they are reading (Tompkins, 1998). When students are given a purpose for reading, they will often become more motivated and engaged in the reading task (McMath et al., 1998; Sanacore, 1991).

**K-W-L**

The K-W-L is a strategy in which a graphic organizer is used to help students in activating background knowledge, asking questions, and organizing the information learned on a given topic (Camp, 2000; Duke & Bennett-Armistead, 2003; Guillaume, 1998; Ogle, 1986; Palmer & Stewart, 2003). The K-W-L can be used with any grade level or subject and can easily be created by making a three-column chart with the sections labeled K, W, and L. The “K” stands for what students already know about the topic to be studied, while the “W” stands for what students want to know about the topic, and the “L” represents what students learned after reading about the topic.

After introducing the topic and the K-W-L chart with the students, teachers ask students to share prior knowledge they may have about the topic, and write their ideas (including misconceptions) in the “what we know” column of the chart. Next, the teacher records student-generated questions about the topic in the “what I want to know” column. These questions often provide students with a relevant purpose for reading the text. Finally, the questions on the chart are reviewed and students read about the particular
topic. When the reading is finished, students return to the chart to record what they have learned and identify any misconceptions they may have had at the beginning.

In her article on nonfiction, Camp (2000) suggests adding a fourth column to the chart for unanswered questions students may still have about the topic. Students are then encouraged to continue to research these questions and add their findings to the chart at a later time.

In an effort to determine the effectiveness of the K-W-L, Ogle (1986) interviewed students about the informational texts they remembered reading over the course of the term. After data was collected, Ogle found that students remembered and recalled information from the nonfiction texts taught using the K-W-L more often than nonfiction texts read without using the K-W-L chart.

**Anticipation Guides**

An anticipation or prediction guide is a comprehension strategy often used to compare students' beliefs about a topic with the text itself (Duffelmeyer & Baum, 1992; Howe et al., 1997; Merkley, 1996; Tompkins, 1998). Anticipation guides are effective in activating background knowledge, clearing up any misconceptions students may have had, and sparking interactive discussions related to the topic. Depending on the complexity, anticipation guides can be used with any grade level and used with the whole class or in small groups. Teachers start by identifying key statements regarding the topic at hand in which students can either agree or disagree with and write them in the middle of the chart. Each statement is read and discussed, allowing adequate time for students to justify why they have chosen to agree or disagree with the statement. The teacher will then initiate a vote for each statement and indicate whether the majority of the class
agrees or disagrees to the left of each statement. Once each statement has been
discussed, the class participates in an informational book reading about the topic.
Afterwards, each statement is reread and students decide whether each statement was true
or false according to the text. For each statement, students should be encouraged to show
examples from the text that support their answers.

A couple modifications to the anticipation guide have been suggested. Merkley
(1996) contends that in addition to agreeing or disagreeing with the statement prior to
reading the text, students should also be given the “I don’t know” option as many
students have very limited background knowledge on certain subjects. This reduces the
frequency of random guessing done before reading the text. In addition, Duffelmeyer &
Baum (1992) suggest that students should support their beliefs with evidence from the
text in written form in an effort to help students retain the newly learned concepts.

Reciprocal Teaching

Reciprocal teaching is a strategy designed to improve reading comprehension
with students in the primary grades and up (Palinscar & Brown, 1985). In reciprocal
teaching, the teacher or adult works with a small group of children and models how to
use four main comprehension activities (questioning, clarifying, summarizing, and
predicting). During questioning, the teacher and the students engage in asking both “on-
the-surface” and “under-the-surface” questions. On-the-surface questions are explicitly
stated in the text and tend to begin with who, what, where, and when. Whereas under-
the-surface questions require children to make inferences or offer opinions and often
begin with how, why, would, could, and should. When students clarify, they learn to
recognize words they are unfamiliar with and try to use context or picture clues in an
attempt to determine the meaning of a particular word. The third comprehension activity emphasized during reciprocal teaching is summarizing. When summarizing, students restate the important elements of the text, which requires children to decide what information to leave in and what can be left out. Finally, during the predicting activities, students are encouraged to access prior knowledge and experiences to make informed guesses about what may happen in a text.

After much practice, students begin to take on the teacher's role of initiating discussion about the text. The student-led discussions continue to focus on asking questions, clarifying, summarizing, and predicting. For a while, the teacher is often present in the group to provide feedback and offer support when needed. However, students usually become very skilled at this strategy, allowing for the teacher to leave the group and work with other students.

The benefits of reciprocal teaching are numerous (Duke & Bennett-Armistead, 2003). Reciprocal teaching helps to improve students' comprehension in the four focus areas. In addition, students are often more engaged in the reading and begin to monitor their own understanding of the text.

*Questioning the Author*

Questioning the author is yet another strategy used to improve student comprehension and strengthen overall knowledge about the world (Duke & Bennett-Armistead, 2003; McKeown, Beck & Worthy, 1993). The primary goal in questioning the author is to teach students to question the author's ideas or concepts in an effort to make sense out of the text. The text is often divided into short segments, depending on the complexity of the content. Students read one section at a time and then stop to
question the author. The teacher and the students ask questions such as, “What does the author mean when she says ____?” or “Did the author explain ____ clearly?” Initially, the teacher asks most of the questions in order to model the process. After participating in this activity for a while, the students begin to initiate the questions and call on other students to discuss their thoughts and ideas on the question. It is crucial to engage the entire group in the questioning and discussion in order for students to reap the maximum benefits this strategy has to offer.

*Sketch to Stretch*

Sketch to stretch is a strategy in which students pictorially represent what they have learned from a particular text (Harste, Short & Woodward, 1988). Students begin by discussing the book and reading the first section, as determined by the teacher. At this point, the students create a mental image of the information presented and then transfer the image to a sketch on paper. While the students are sketching, the teacher encourages students to draw additional details discussed in the book. Students then discuss their sketches, explaining with each other the reasons for drawing what they did. Next, the students read the remainder of the text. After reading, the students return to their sketches to revise or add details based on the new information presented in the book. This strategy promotes in-depth student thinking in order to make meaning of a text. In addition, visual learners find sketch to stretch extremely appealing based on the nature of the activity.

*Experience-Text-Relationship (E-T-R)*

The Experience-Text-Relationship strategy is one aimed to improve comprehension and promote connections with the text (Duke & Bennett-Armistead,
In this strategy, the teacher begins by having students share personal experiences related to a particular topic that will be explored further. Some teachers find it helpful to record the students' experiences on a large piece of poster paper. After the students' background knowledge has been activated, a text on the topic is usually read aloud to the class, stopping to discuss sections of the text that may be related to the experiences shared in the initial discussion. After reading the book, the teacher initiates a discussion of the relationships between the students' personal experiences and the information presented in the text. For example, if a class was studying butterflies, the teacher would first ask students to share their experiences with butterflies. A text about butterflies would then be read aloud to the children. Finally, the students would share relationships between their experiences with butterflies and what the book said about butterflies. The teacher may need to prompt students with questions such as, "What things did you notice about butterflies were also discussed in the book?"

Textbooks and Trade Books

When incorporating nonfiction into the classrooms, schools can use a variety of books, including reference books, textbooks, and trade books. These three types of books have unique qualities and serve different purposes for learning (Jacobs & Tunnell, 2004). Reference books include atlases, dictionaries, encyclopedias, and thesauruses and are used to find instant answers to questions. Textbooks are designed for classroom instruction and display information in an organized fashion. Trade books are books that can be purchased in a retail market or checked out from a library. These books usually include in-depth knowledge on a specific subject. Jacobs and Tunnell polled students in their college reading courses and found that 60 to 95 percent of the books used to teach
content in their students' schooling were textbooks. Meanwhile, trade books were only used ten to 15 percent of the time according to the college students polled.

Since textbooks and trade books are used more frequently to teach content, a greater amount of study has been done to focus on these two areas. Both textbooks and trade books have many strengths, but they also have numerous disadvantages.

In their book on content area literacy in the elementary school, Alvermann, Swafford and Montero (2004) write about the strengths and limitations of both textbooks and trade books. The authors maintain there are a number of strengths in using textbooks. First textbooks provide readers with a broad overview of the particular subject being studied. Second, textbooks usually offer a scope and sequence for each text through the grade levels which is often helpful for the beginning teachers. Third, textbook authors are usually very knowledgeable in their field of study. Another advantage found in textbooks is that they are typically consistent with national educational standards. Fifth, textbooks often provide teachers and students with up-to-date, research-based strategies often providing organizational features aimed at helping readers better understand the text. Lastly, textbooks are revised frequently, giving students current information on the topic.

Though textbooks do have their advantages, like everything else, they also have disadvantages. First, textbooks lack the in-depth coverage on many topics, making it a challenge for students to fully grasp certain concepts. Perhaps the most prominent disadvantage is the inappropriate reading level of many textbooks, making it difficult for students to fully comprehend. The authors list several reasons on why students may find textbooks difficult: (a) the readability of the text is often higher than the level students
are capable of reading, (b) the vocabulary used is often unfamiliar to the students, (c) there are many topics packed into a limited number of pages, making the content extremely dense, (d) the use of description in a textbook makes it difficult for many students to organize and retain the information presented to them, and (e) textbooks often lack valuable transitions, which aid students in identifying relationships among different ideas (Alvermann et al., 2004).

Just like textbooks, there are many benefits to using trade books to teach informational content. First, the authors explain that the trade book market has exploded, offering many up-to-date books on just about any topic you can imagine. Next, most trade book authors spend a lengthy period of time studying their topic before writing about it, giving them authority on the topic. Third, because of the number and variety of trade books, it should be easy to find a book to fit every reader's needs. Fourth, because trade books are written at various levels, they provide opportunities for struggling readers to engage in the content, rather than simply looking at the pictures. Fifth, the author claims that another advantage of using trade books is that they offer multiple perspectives on a single topic or issue. Sixth, trade books foster positive student attitudes toward learning content. Seventh, reading a variety of trade books can often help build students' background knowledge and vocabulary. Eighth, by reading trade books students are exposed to multiple expository text features, such as comparing and contrasting, problem and solution, and sequencing. Ninth, trade books offer interesting and appealing formats sure to attract readers' attention and draw them into the pages. Above all, trade books offer opportunities for students to enhance their critical thinking skills by evaluating author credibility or overall coverage of a topic (Alvermann et al., 2004).
Though trade books have numerous strengths, they also have a couple disadvantages which may prevent some teachers from using them in the content. The first disadvantage of trade books is that many teachers find it difficult to locate the most current trade books on the market today. Teachers may need to search to find appropriate books for a particular unit of study. The second limitation is the substantial number of trade books available today. Although this may not seem like a limitation, teachers find it challenging to choose the quality informational trade books when there are so many to choose from (Alvermann et al., 2004).

Even though textbooks and trade books have both strengths and limitations, Jacobs and Tunnell (2004) promote the use of trade books over textbooks, by explaining that they inspire and motivate young readers to become involved and acquire meaning from the text. In fact, Jacobs and Tunnell write, “Interesting perspectives simply are easier to find in trade books than in textbooks. And today's informational trade books are often tantalizing. They help create interest in young readers” (p. 319).

Summary

Even though incorporating nonfiction in the primary grades is a relatively new topic in the field of reading education, the studies that have been done suggest that young children can be just as successful with nonfiction as with narrative text and teachers need to make a valiant effort to expose children to the nonfiction genre, starting as early as kindergarten (Duke, 2000; Duke & Kays, 1998; Pappas, 1993). Just as people learn about the world through experience, students learn knowledge of various genres through repeated exposure and experience. By involving students in a variety of texts, teachers can ensure that they will be better prepared to meet the literacy demands of the future.
In addition to preparing students for future reading demands, nonfiction is the preferred genre of many students, often serving as a catalyst for their overall literacy development (Caswell & Duke, 1998). To further explain this notion, Moss et al. write, “All too often, teachers fail to capitalize on the fascination that facts hold for youngsters like these. We fill our classrooms with a plethora of stories, ignoring the excitement for reading that information books might ignite” (p. 418). Nonfiction often addresses the interests and questions of many young minds, giving students a genuine purpose to explore the wonders of informational text. Finally, when young students are exposed to nonfiction, their background knowledge and vocabulary tend to expand which often results in increased comprehension (Benjamin & Moynihan, 2005; Moss, 1995). With these benefits in mind, exposing children to nonfiction in the primary grades will surely aid in their overall reading success.
CHAPTER THREE
Methodology

Introduction

The first purpose of this project is to create a handbook that provides primary teachers (K-2) with practical strategies for incorporating age-appropriate nonfiction into the classroom. The second purpose is to provide primary students with opportunities to engage in informational text in order to better prepare children to meet the literacy demands of the future.

The handbook is divided into three main sections. The first section contains lesson plans for eight strategies identified by research to improve primary students’ comprehension of nonfiction text. The next section provides teachers with other suggested practices for incorporating nonfiction into the primary grades. Finally, the last two sections offer valuable resources for locating and selecting quality nonfiction literature.

Procedures

The primary goal of this handbook is to provide a quick and easy reference for primary teachers to use in supplementing their reading and other subject area curriculum. Research indicates nonfiction is rarely used in the primary grades (Duke, 2000). In addition, many teachers are unfamiliar with strategies specific to content area teaching, creating a need for content area professional development, especially in the primary grades.

The handbook begins by providing an introduction on the importance of incorporating nonfiction into the primary grades. Nonfiction texts often offer answers to
young students’ questions and curiosities about the world. Furthermore, some students prefer nonfiction more than narrative text and often are more motivated to read material that they personally enjoy (Caswell & Duke, 1998; Pappas, 1993). Finally, incorporating nonfiction in the primary grades provides students with opportunities to build background knowledge, as well as strengthen vocabulary and comprehension (Benjamin & Moynihan, 2005; McMath et al., 1998; Moss, 1995).

Following the introduction, the manual is then divided into three sections. The first section offers eight detailed lesson plans focusing on strategies used to increase primary students’ comprehension of informational text. Each lesson is designed to be very accessible for primary teachers and includes the following parts: (a) objectives, (b) Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs), (c) materials needed, (d) step by step procedures, and (e) a conclusion or wrap up activity.

The second section of the handbook contains other advantageous practices for using nonfiction in the primary classroom. Some of these practices include recording informational books on cassette tapes for children to follow along with, creating informational ABC books using a topic such as the rain forest, and providing a classroom environment rich in a variety of texts, including nonfiction.

The final sections of the handbook provide teachers with useful resources for finding and selecting appropriate nonfiction literature. A list suggesting how to select quality nonfiction is included along with ideas on locating particular texts for use in the classroom. In addition, a list of suggested nonfiction authors and titles is also provided.

Resources used in compiling this project were educational journals including Language Arts, The Reading Teacher, and Childhood Education, and books such as
Reading and Writing in the Primary Grades by Nell Duke and Susan Bennett-Armistead and Fifty Literacy Strategies by Gail Tompkins. Various children's literature web sites were also used in creating this project.
CHAPTER FOUR

The Project
Incorporating Nonfiction Into the Primary Grades: A Handbook for K-2 Teachers

By

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Spring 2006

Central Washington University
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This handbook was created to assist teachers in incorporating nonfiction in the primary classrooms. Research studies indicate that because of the overemphasis of fiction in the primary grades, most students are unfamiliar with the organization and text features unique to nonfiction. Additional studies reveal that students as young as kindergarten are capable of understanding nonfiction texts when given appropriate teacher support. Furthermore, primary children reap many benefits that reading nonfiction has to offer.

This handbook is designed to help primary teachers incorporate more nonfiction into their reading and subject area curriculum. The handbook contains lesson plans for eight reading strategies effective in improving students’ comprehension of nonfiction text. This handbook also includes additional suggestions for using nonfiction in primary classrooms. Finally, resources for finding and selecting quality nonfiction and suggested nonfiction titles and authors are provided. This project is organized so that busy teachers can quickly and efficiently access information needed to incorporate nonfiction into their classrooms.

Assessment for the eight lessons can be done through teacher observation, informal student interviews, or written responses. Teacher observation is critical when teaching students to use the eight strategies described in the project because many activities require students to follow steps independently. Informal student interviews can be an effective way to monitor students’ depth and understanding of the strategies presented. During an informal student interview, a teacher may ask a student to verbally explain a strategy or describe its usefulness. Finally, written responses will typically be found in journal entries that are used in conjunction with informational text.
• About 80 percent of the reading done outside of the classroom is nonfiction in nature (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000).

• As much as 90 percent of the reading done in elementary classrooms is narrative (Caswell & Duke, 1998; Dreher, 1998).

• In one study of 20 first grade classrooms, Duke (2000) found that students were only spending an average of 3.6 minutes a day on nonfiction texts. Furthermore, the ten schools from the lower socioeconomic backgrounds spent an average of 1.9 minutes a day using nonfiction, some not using a single minute a day.

• About 70 to 80 percent of the reading required on standardized tests is expository (Daniels, 2002).

• Many elementary teachers implement the more basic reading strategies, but tend to be unfamiliar with strategies specific to content area teaching. Factors that positively influenced teachers’ usage of content area strategies include teaching the same grade level for an extended period of time, attending content area workshops, and teachers with less than five years of teaching experience (Howe, Grierson & Richmond, 1997).

• Researchers suggest that the fourth grade slump or expository gap would decrease if students had the opportunity to engage in nonfiction text from

- When given the choice, many students prefer nonfiction over fiction (Caswell & Duke, 1998; Duke & Kays, 1998; Pappas, 1993).

- The National Assessment of Student Progress studied the highest and lowest achieving schools in our nation based on fourth grade standardized test scores and found that the highest third achieving schools indicated reading more nonfiction than students in the lowest third achieving schools (Campbell, Kapinus & Beatty, as cited in Dreher, 1998).

- Students do not need to master learning to read before moving to reading to learn (Guillaume, 1998).

- Studies conducted of kindergarten students’ retellings of informational books reveal that young children can be just as successful with making meaning out of informational text as with stories (Duke & Kays, 1998; Pappas, 1993).

- Students often make more connections with nonfiction read-alouds than with narrative stories (Smolkin & Donovan, 2001).
The Benefits of Using Nonfiction

Most individuals noted for their work in the field of nonfiction reading possess numerous beliefs on the benefits of incorporating informational text into the primary grades. Based on the review of literature, some of the most common reasons for increasing the use of nonfiction in the primary grades are expressed below.

1. The inclusion of nonfiction at an early age can better prepare students for future reading experiences, which may be overwhelmingly expository in nature. It is at this point when many children are expected to systematically shift from learning to read to reading to learn and often experience the fourth grade slump or expository gap. If students had continuous opportunities to use and explore nonfiction from the start of schooling, perhaps this gap would decrease (Duke, 2000; Duke & Kays, 1998; Guillaume, 1998; Pappas, 1993). In addition, the 1992 National Assessment of Educational Progress studied the highest and lowest achieving schools in our nation based on fourth grade standardized test scores and found that the highest third achieving schools indicated reading more nonfiction than did the students in the lowest third achieving schools (Campbell, Kapinus & Beatty, as cited in Dreher, 1998).
2. Nonfiction can provide students a “way in” to literacy whereas other genres have failed to capture their attention and inspire motivation. When given the choice, some students actually prefer to read an expository text rather than a narrative one (Caswell & Duke, 1998; Duke & Kays, 1998; Pappas, 1993).

3. Nonfiction satisfies the curiosities of many young minds, answering questions they may have about the world. In addition, children may encounter new questions or problems, thus creating a purpose for them to further their reading in a quest to find answers and solve their problems. When the purpose of reading is to find answers to their own questions, children are often more motivated to read and engage in the activity for a longer period of time (Benjamin & Moynihan, 2005; McMath et al., 1998; Sanacore, 1991; Yopp & Yopp, 2000).

4. Incorporating nonfiction into the primary classrooms may add to students’ overall literacy proficiency. When students are competent in a variety of genres, they become more fully literate and prepared for the reading demands they may encounter (Duke & Bennett-Armistead, 2003; Pappas & Pettegrew, 1998). Pappas (1991) expresses the same idea when she states, “Exclusive use of stories, thus may end up being a barrier to full access to literacy. Children need opportunities to use books from a range of genres” (p. 461).
5. Finally, reading nonfiction builds students’ knowledge bases about the world and provides an introduction to unfamiliar concepts. Reading informational books gives students the opportunity to explore the world around them through text, as many will never really climb Mt. Everest or visit the Egyptian Pyramids. This increased background knowledge of the world typically leads to increased vocabulary development and comprehension as well (Benjamin & Moynihan, 2005; McMath et al., 1998; Moss, 1995).
Eight Strategies for Improving Nonfiction Comprehension

1. Interactive Read-Alouds
2. Venn Diagrams
4. Anticipation Guides
5. Reciprocal Teaching
6. Questioning the Author
7. Sketch to Stretch Activities
8. Experience-Text-Relationship
Interactive Read-Alouds

Objectives:
1. Students will verbally make connections between the nonfiction text and related texts, other people or places, or students' own lives.
2. Students will become aware of the patterns and features unique to nonfiction text.
3. Students will build vocabulary and background knowledge related to the specific subject being read to them.

EALRs:
1. Reading 2.1 Demonstrate evidence of reading comprehension.
2. Reading 2.3 Expand comprehension by analyzing, interpreting, and synthesizing information and ideas in literary and informational text.
3. Reading 3.1 Read to learn new information.
4. Reading 3.4 Read for literary/narrative experience in a variety of genres.

Materials:
1. Nonfiction book (perhaps one that ties into the curriculum or the children's interest)

Procedure:
1. Invite children to come to a central location in which the book being read aloud is visible to all.
2. Begin by telling the students that you will be sharing a special nonfiction book about ______________ with them today.
3. Give students a couple minutes to think about what they already know on the subject; then have them share their ideas with a partner. Call on a couple students to share their ideas aloud with the group.
4. Explain to students that as you read, some ideas may remind them of other experiences. The nonfiction book may remind students of other books, other people or places, or an experience from their personal lives.
5. Pause at the end of each page and allow children to share these connections they have made with the text.
6. While reading the text aloud to students, informally model various features unique to nonfiction—the table of contents, diagrams, captions, maps, footnotes, glossary, index, subheadings, etc.

**Note: It is not necessary to read the nonfiction book from front to back. In fact, most proficient readers of nonfiction skip around to locate information of interest to them.
Wrap Up:

1. Together as a group, invite students to summarize some of the information they learned in the book and the connections made with other books, people or places, or their own lives. The teacher may choose to write the ideas on chart paper for future reference or just to complete the activity orally.
Think-Aloud Starters

If we want students to become proficient readers of nonfiction, we need to provide the adequate modeling for them to do so. Below are some think-aloud starters to model with children during interactive read-alouds.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Think-Aloud Starters</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adjusting Comprehension</td>
<td>- That doesn’t make sense to me because...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- I didn’t understand that part, I’d better go back...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- I still don’t understand what that means; I’m going to try...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Knowledge</td>
<td>- I already know some things about...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- That reminds me of...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- That doesn’t fit with what I know about...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generating Questions</td>
<td>- I wonder...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- I notice...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- It is interesting/frustrating/exciting/etc. that...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text Structure</td>
<td>- I think this is organized by...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- This section talked about... so I think the next section will be about...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Looking at these headings/titles/graphics/etc., I see that...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarizing</td>
<td>- So far, I’ve read that...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- I think the main points are...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- This was about...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Duke & Bennett-Armistead, 2003)
Using Pair-It Books for Interactive Read-Alouds

One way to incorporate nonfiction into classroom read-alouds is to pair a nonfiction book with a narrative one on the same topic. This provides students with the opportunity to explore differences between the two genres. In addition, students are supported with the background and vocabulary necessary to fully comprehend a narrative text. Below is a list of paired book titles especially for children in the primary grades.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fiction</th>
<th>Nonfiction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Two Bad Ants</em> by Chris VanAllsburg</td>
<td><em>The Life and Times of an Ant</em> by Micucci</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Very Quiet Cricket</em> by Eric Carle</td>
<td><em>Chirping Crickets</em> by Melvin Berger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Owl Moon</em> by Jane Yolen</td>
<td><em>Owl</em> by Mary Ling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Stellaluna</em> by Janell Cannon</td>
<td><em>Bats</em> by Celia Band</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Red Leaf, Yellow Leaf</em> by Lois Ehlert</td>
<td><em>Why Do Leaves Change Color?</em> by Betsy Maestro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Postcards from Pluto: A Tour of the Solar System</em> by Loreen Leedy</td>
<td><em>Do Stars Have Points?</em> by Melvin and Gilda Berger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Amazing Grace</em> by Mary Hoffman</td>
<td><em>The Story of Ruby Bridges</em> by Robert Coles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Whales</em> by Cynthia Rylant</td>
<td><em>Whales</em> by John Bonnett Wexo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Old Bear</em> by Jane Hissey</td>
<td><em>How Teddy Bears are Made</em> by Ann Morris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs</em> by Judi Barrett</td>
<td><em>Comets, Meteors, and Asteroids</em> by Seymour Simon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Camp, 2000; Yopp & Yopp, 2000)
Objectives:
1. Students will read nonfiction text(s) and compare and contrast two topics.
2. Students will think analytically about what they are reading and learning on a particular subject.

EALRs:
1. Reading 2.1 Demonstrate evidence of reading comprehension.
2. Reading 2.3 Expand comprehension by analyzing, interpreting, and synthesizing information and ideas in literary and informational text.
3. Reading 3.2 Read to perform a task.
4. Reading 3.4 Read for literary/narrative experience in a variety of genres.

Materials:
1. One large sheet of chart paper with 2 overlapping circles drawn on it.
2. One or more books focusing on a central theme.
3. Markers for recording information on the Venn diagram.

Procedure:
1. The teacher begins the lesson by asking students a key question to establish the focus. For example, the teacher may ask, “How are pumpkins and apples similar?” Or “How are they different?”
2. The teacher then labels the empty Venn diagram by writing “pumpkins” next to one of the circles, “apples” next to the other, and the word “both” in the overlapping section for commonalities between the two topics. It may be helpful to add pictures next to each label, as well.
3. Remind children that as they read, they are trying to find some differences and similarities between the two topics.
4. Read and discuss the text. This may be done in a whole group, in small groups, independently, or as a read-aloud.
5. When finished, invite students to come up to the Venn diagram and write or draw differences between the two topics in the outer circles, and similarities in the overlapping part of the circles.

**Note: Instead of a Venn diagram, a T-chart (created by making a large T on a piece of chart paper and write the two topics on each side of the T) can be just as effective when comparing and contrasting two topics.

Wrap Up:
1. When the diagram is complete, allow students time to work with a partner to summarize the information represented in the Venn diagram either orally or in written form.
Sample Venn Diagram

- 1700's
  - Born in Virginia
  - Carried water for drinking from a stream
  - Liked to fly kites and ride horses
  - 1st president
  - Was a general in the army

- Both presidents
  - Lived on farms
  - Both home-schooled for part of the time
  - Both worked hard and never gave up

- 1800's
  - Born in Kentucky
  - Chopped wood and fed farm animals
  - Liked to go fishing and climb trees
  - Loved to read books
  - 16th president
  - Wore a tall black hat

George Washington
Abe Lincoln
Venn Diagram

(Tompkins, 1998)
Objectives:
1. Students will activate their background knowledge on a particular subject by collectively brainstorming what they already know on the topic.
2. Students will generate questions pertaining to the given topic.
3. Students will organize information they have learned after reading about a particular topic.
4. Students will identify any misconceptions they may have had on the topic.

EALRs:
1. Reading 2.1 Demonstrate evidence of reading comprehension.
2. Reading 2.3 Expand comprehension by analyzing, interpreting, and synthesizing information and ideas in literary and informational text.
3. Reading 3.1 Read to learn new information.
4. Reading 3.2 Read to perform a task.

Materials:
1. A large sheet of chart paper divided into three sections, labeled with a “K,” “W,” and “L.”
2. Markers

Procedure:
1. Introduce the topic and the K-W-L chart by explaining to students that they will be reading an informational book about ____________, but before reading you want to know what they already know about the topic and any questions they have. Furthermore, explain that the “K” on the chart represents what they already know, the “W” on the chart represents what the students want to know about the topic, and the “L” stands for the information learned after reading about the topic.
2. Start by allowing students to brainstorm what they already know about the topic. Write each idea (including misconceptions) in the column on the chart labeled “K” for what the students already know.
3. Then provide students an opportunity to generate questions pertinent to the topic. If this is a challenge for them, have them start with the words “I wonder…” Write each question in the column labeled “W” for what students want to learn.
4. Read the informational text (or texts) about the subject. This can be done independently, as a whole group, or in small groups.
5. Review the chart with students by rereading the questions they had about the topic.
6. Move to the last column of the chart labeled with an “L” for what students learned, and allow students time to organize the new information gained from reading the book. Then write what they learned in this column.

7. Give students the opportunity to look for any misconceptions they may have had at the beginning and rewrite them to reflect the correct information in the “W” column.

**Note: As a modification to the K-W-L chart, consider adding a fourth column to the chart for unanswered questions students may still have about the topic. Encourage students to use other resources to locate this information, and allow them time to share with the class.

**Wrap Up:**

1. Later on in the day/week, have students pair up and share what they learned about ______________________.
## Sample K-W-L Chart

**K-W-L Chart on Spiders**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>K What We Know</th>
<th>W What We Want to Know</th>
<th>L What We Learned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Spiders are poisonous.</td>
<td>1. What are baby spiders like?</td>
<td>1. Spiders have eight legs and two body parts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Spiders make webs.</td>
<td>2. Do spiders know how to swim?</td>
<td>2. Spiders are called arachnids.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Spiders can’t fly.</td>
<td>4. Where do most spiders live?</td>
<td>4. Spiders can be as small as a speck of dirt or as big as a dinner plate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Spiders are usually black.</td>
<td>5. How many legs do spiders have?</td>
<td>5. The black widow spider is black with red spots and can kill a person with their poison.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Spiders eat other bugs.</td>
<td>6. Do spiders have wings?</td>
<td>6. Baby spiders are called spiderlings. Mother spiders can have up to a thousand babies at one time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Spiders can bite people.</td>
<td>8. What is the black spider with red dots called?</td>
<td>8. Spiders were here before dinosaurs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## K-W-L Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>K</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>L</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What We Know</td>
<td>What We Want to Know</td>
<td>What We Learned</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Ogle, 1986)
Modified K-W-L Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>K</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>L</th>
<th>U</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What We Know</strong></td>
<td><strong>What We Want to Know</strong></td>
<td><strong>What We Learned</strong></td>
<td><strong>Unanswered Questions</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Camp, 2000; Ogle, 1986)
Objectives:
1. Students will activate their background knowledge on a given topic.
2. Students will identify any misconceptions they may have had about a particular topic after reading about the topic.
3. Students will justify what they have learned using information from the text.

EALRs:
1. Reading 2.1 Demonstrate evidence of reading comprehension.
2. Reading 2.3 Expand comprehension by analyzing, interpreting, and synthesizing information and ideas in literary and informational text.
3. Reading 3.1 Read to learn new information.

Materials:
1. A blank anticipation guide on chart paper or an overhead.
2. A nonfiction book or set of books on the particular topic.
3. Markers.

Procedure:
1. Teachers can prepare an anticipation guide by writing 4 to 8 key statements about the topic at hand. Some of the statements should be accurate; whereas some should contain common misconceptions about the topic.
2. Read each statement together with the students. Provide students with enough time to discuss why they agree or disagree with each statement on the anticipation guide. This can easily be accomplished by having students share their ideas with a partner.
3. For each statement, students collectively decide whether they agree or disagree with the statement by taking a class vote. Indicate whether the majority of the class agrees or disagrees with the statement by marking either the “agree” or “disagree” box to the left of each statement.
4. After each statement has been discussed, the class will read an informational book or set of books on the topic.
5. After reading, each statement on the anticipation guide is reread and students once again decide whether they agree or disagree with each statement based on the new information provided. Encourage students to show examples from the text supporting their answers.
6. The teacher indicates whether the students now “agree” or “disagree” on the right side of each statement.

**Note: As a modification to the anticipation guide, students can also be given the “I don’t know” option in addition to agreeing or disagreeing with each statement prior to reading the informational book. Some students have limited
background knowledge and this may reduce the frequency of random guessing done prior to reading a text.

**Wrap Up:**
1. Review the before and after responses for each statement and allow students the opportunity to discuss any misconceptions they may have had prior to reading information on the subject.
Sample Anticipation Guide

Anticipation Guide for
The Pumpkin Book
By Gail Gibbons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The bigger the pumpkin seed is, the bigger the pumpkin will be when it grows.</strong></td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>After planting the pumpkin seed, it takes about 5 months for leaves to appear.</strong></td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Golden flowers grow on the pumpkin vines.</strong></td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>It takes about 3 weeks for a seed to become a ripe pumpkin.</strong></td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pumpkins are picked in the fall.</strong></td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The largest pumpkin ever weighed as much as a car.</strong></td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Indians taught the pilgrims how to plant pumpkins for food.</strong></td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pumpkins last longer when they are carved.</strong></td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Anticipation Guide

Anticipation Guide for

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>

(Duffelmeyer & Baum, 1992)
Modified Anticipation Guide

Anticipation Guide for

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>I Don't Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(Merkley, 1996)
Objectives:
1. Students will generate and answer questions based on a nonfiction book.
2. Students will recognize unfamiliar words and use appropriate vocabulary strategies to determine meaning.
3. Students will summarize sections of a nonfiction text.
4. Students use prior knowledge and experiences to predict what may happen in a nonfiction text.

EALRs:
1. Reading 1.2 Use vocabulary (word meaning) strategies to comprehend text.
2. Reading 2.1 Demonstrate evidence of reading comprehension.
3. Reading 2.3 Expand comprehension by analyzing, interpreting, and synthesizing information and ideas in literary and informational text.
4. Reading 2.4 Think critically and analyze author’s use of language, style, purpose, and perspective in informational and literary text.

Materials:
1. A nonfiction book or magazine article on a particular subject of study.

Procedure:
1. In a small reading group of four to five students, introduce the nonfiction book or magazine article to the children.
2. Also introduce or review the four comprehension skills that are emphasized during reciprocal teaching (questioning, clarifying, summarizing, and predicting). In the beginning, start by only using one strategy each lesson until all four have been thoroughly explained and practiced.
3. Students read a small section of the text aloud.
4. QUESTIONING: Both the teacher and the students share in asking and answering “on-the-surface” and “under-the-surface” questions about the small section of the text that was just read. On-the-surface questions are explicitly stated in the text and tend to begin with who, what, where, and when. Whereas under-the-surface questions require children to make inferences or offer opinions and often begin with how, why, could, and should.
5. Students read another small section of the text aloud.
6. CLARIFYING: Students reflect on the section of the text they just read and identify any unfamiliar or interesting words. Both the students and the teacher take turns at trying to determine the meaning of the word (or words) by using context and other text clues, such as picture clues.
7. Students read another small section of the text aloud.
8. SUMMARIZING: Both the students and the teacher practice restating the important elements from the text to this point. In addition, more skilled groups can decide which information should be left in the summary and which information can be left out.

9. Students read another small section of the text aloud.

10. PREDICTING: Both the students and the teacher access prior knowledge and experiences to make informed guesses about future events in the text.

11. Students read the remainder of the text aloud. They will continue to use the four comprehension skills listed on the poster to discuss the last part of the text.

**Note:** When first introducing the reciprocal teaching strategy to students, the teacher is very involved modeling each of the four comprehension skills. However after much practice, students begin to take on the teacher's role of initiating discussion about the text focusing on questioning, clarifying, summarizing, and predicting. For a while the teacher is present during much of the group reading time to provide feedback and offer support. Some students become very skilled at this strategy, allowing the teacher to leave the group and work with other students.

**Wrap Up:**

1. Occasionally, have reading groups evaluate their participation during reciprocal teaching using the reciprocal teaching scoring guide and make goals for future improvement.
### Comprehension Skills for Reciprocal Teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Clarify</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Ask “on-the-surface” questions about the text.  
**WHO?** **WHAT?** **WHERE?** **WHEN?** | • What are some words in the text that I really don’t know very well?  
• How could I figure out what these words mean?  
• Are there any clues that might help me figure out the word? |
| • Ask “under-the-surface” questions about the text.  
**HOW?** **WHY?** **COULD?** **SHOULD?** | |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summarize</th>
<th>Predict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • What are the most important ideas in the text?  
• Choose what to keep in and what to leave out of the summary.  
• What things help me when creating the summary? | • What do I think will happen next?  
• Why do I think that? |

(Duke & Bennett-Armistead, 2003)
Reciprocal Teaching Scoring Guide

| 4 | • *Every* student participated in the discussion.  
    • Our group spent *all of the time* on task.  
    • We used both on-the-surface and under-the-surface questions that *challenged* the group to think.  
    • We used *all 4* reading comprehension skills. |
|---|---|
| 3 | • *Every* student participated in the discussion.  
    • Our group spent *most* of the time on task.  
    • We used both on-the-surface and under-the-surface questions.  
    • We used *most* of the reading comprehension skills. |
| 2 | • *Some* students participated in the discussion.  
    • Our group spent *some* time on task.  
    • Our group used *mostly* on-the-surface questions.  
    • We only used a *one or two* of the reading comprehension skills. |
| 1 | • *Few* students participated in the discussion.  
    • Our group spent *very little* time on task.  
    • Our group used *only* on-the-surface questions.  
    • We *did not* use the 4 reading comprehension skills. |

Our group will get better if we _______________________

____________________________________________________________________.
Reciprocal Teaching Excerpt

Below is a sample reciprocal teaching excerpt used with a small group of second graders while reading the book *Floating in Space* by Franklyn Branley.

The students choral read several pages of the book together and then stopped for discussion.

STUDENT 1: What is a space vehicle called?

TEACHER: You have a good question. Can you call on someone to answer it?

STUDENT 2: It is called a space shuttle and they can go really far, like to the moon.

TEACHER: Why don’t you fall to the ground immediately after jumping when you are on the moon?

STUDENT 1: Probably because the air on the moon is lighter than the air on Earth.

STUDENT 3: I think it is because the moon has less gravity, so it doesn’t pull you down as much.

STUDENT 2: What does “gravity” mean?

STUDENT 4: It is what pulls you down, like the picture shows.

STUDENT 3: But on the moon, there is not very much gravity, so you are not pulled down. You just sort of float around.

TEACHER: Let’s continue reading a little bit more in our book.

Students read the next several pages aloud.

STUDENT 4: Teacher, what does weightless mean?

STUDENT 1: It means that you don’t weigh anything because in the book it said “you don’t feel any weight at all.”

TEACHER: You did a great job using the words in the book to help you figure out the meaning of weightless. Did someone figure out the meaning a different way?

STUDENT 3: I just thought of the word “careless” and I know that that means you don’t care, so then I thought weightless might mean that you don’t weigh anything.
TEACHER: That is another good strategy for figuring out the word. Let’s continue to read on.

Students read the next several pages aloud.

TEACHER: Let’s try to summarize what we have read so far. Think about the most important ideas we have learned so far in the book.

STUDENT 2: I think they are trying to tell us that Earth has lots of gravity, but the moon doesn’t.

STUDENT 1: And that’s why people float around when they are on the moon and in a space shuttle.

STUDENT 3: It makes it hard to do things without lots of gravity.

TEACHER: What do you think the author will tell us about next?

STUDENT 2: I think the book will tell us some of the things that will be hard to do when you are in space because look at the pictures coming up...and read the labels.

Students continue with the discussion focusing on the four comprehension skills (questioning, clarifying, summarizing, and predicting).
Objectives:
1. Students question the concepts and ideas the author is trying to convey as they read nonfiction texts.
2. Students work to make what they read understandable.
3. Students interpret the information in a text until it makes sense.

EALRs:
1. Reading 2.1 Demonstrate evidence of reading comprehension.
2. Reading 2.3 Expand comprehension by analyzing, interpreting, and synthesizing information and ideas in literary and informational text.
3. Think critically and analyze author’s use of language, style, purpose, and perspective in informational and literary text.
4. Reading 3.1 Read to learn new information.

Materials:
1. A nonfiction book or text related to a particular unit of study.
2. Teachers may want to have a copy of the “Queries to Guide Questioning the Author Discussions” for easy reference.

Procedure:
1. It is helpful if the teacher reads ahead and segments the text into manageable sections.
2. Introduce the text with students and give them an opportunity to share prior knowledge on the subject.
3. Have students read a small section of the text together. Then stop and initiate queries or questions that the students may have about the concepts or ideas the author is trying to convey (You may initially want to use the “Queries to Guide Questioning the Author Discussions” chart.). Teachers and students ask queries such as, “What does the author mean when she says _____?” or “Did the author explain _____ clearly?” At first the teacher models the questioning, but after practice the students begin to take on a more active role in initiating the questioning.
4. Continue this process by reading short segments of the text and stopping to question the author’s ideas and concepts presented in the book.
5. After reading the text, it may be beneficial to have the students reread the text either independently or with someone in order to better solidify the new concepts learned in the book.
Wrap Up:
1. Have students summarize or recap ideas either verbally or in a journal to reinforce students’ learning.
## Queries to Guide Questioning the Author Discussions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Queries</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| Initiate the discussion | • What is the author trying to say?  
• What is the author’s message?  
• What is the author talking about? |
| Help students focus on the author’s message | • That is what the author says, but what does it mean? |
| Help students connect information | • How does that connect with what the author has already told us?  
• What information has the author added here that connects with ______? |
| Identify difficulties with the way the author has presented information or ideas | • Does that make sense?  
• Is that said in a clear way?  
• Did the author explain that clearly? Why or why not? What is missing? What do we need to figure out? |
| Encourage students to refer to the text either because they have misinterpreted a text statement or to help them recognize that they have made an inference | • Did the author tell us that?  
• Did the author give us the answer to that? |

(Duke & Bennett-Armistead, 2003)
**Objectives:**
1. Students make mental images of information presented in a nonfiction text.
2. Students draw pictures or diagrams to represent information learned from a particular text.
3. Students extend their comprehension of the text by explaining their sketches to others in the class.

**EALRs:**
1. Reading 2.1 Demonstrate evidence of reading comprehension.
2. Reading 2.3 Expand comprehension by analyzing, interpreting, and synthesizing information and ideas in literary and informational text.
3. Reading 3.1 Read to learn new information.
4. Reading 3.4 Read for literary/narrative experience in a variety of genres.

**Materials:**
1. A nonfiction book or text related to a particular unit of study.
2. Drawing paper.
3. Crayons, colored pencils, paints, or markers.

**Procedure:**
1. Begin by discussing a book or related text on a particular unit of study. Then read about a third of the book aloud to the class.
2. At this point, stop and have students create a mental image of the information presented to them.
3. Provide drawing materials and invite students to make a sketch representing the information presented so far in the text. Encourage them to include as many details as possible.
4. At the end of the allotted sketching time, pair students up and have them explain their drawings to each other, highlighting new information and vocabulary presented in the text.
5. Instruct students to set their sketches aside and read the remainder of the text aloud. At the end of the text, have students make another mental image representing the new information.
6. Encourage students to revise their existing sketches by adding new details presented in the text.
7. If time allows, have students share their sketches with a partner once again.

**Wrap Up:**
1. Students compare changes made from first sketch to their second one.
2. Students discuss concepts or themes that are represented in many of the sketches. This often leads to summarization of the text.
Objectives:
1. Students share their experiences about a particular topic.
2. Students will make connections between their personal experiences and concepts presented in a nonfiction text.

EALRs:
1. Reading 2.1 Demonstrate evidence of reading comprehension.
2. Reading 2.3 Expand comprehension by analyzing, interpreting, and synthesizing information and ideas in literary and informational text.
3. Reading 3.1 Read to learn new information.
4. Reading 3.4 Read for literary/narrative experience in a variety of genres.

Materials:
1. A nonfiction book or text related to a particular unit of study.
2. Poster paper to record personal experiences (optional).

Procedure:
1. Experience. Introduce a nonfiction text to students and allow them to share personal experiences or prior knowledge they have about the subject at hand. The ideas may be recorded on a sheet of poster paper for visual reference later in the lesson.
2. Text. Focus children on the nonfiction text by reading it aloud and questioning or discussing portions of it related to experiences shared at the beginning of the lesson.
3. Relationship. Encourage children to discuss relationships between the text and their personal experiences. Refer to the poster paper listing personal experiences. If necessary, prompt students by asking, “Which things that you noticed about butterflies were also talked about in the book?”

Wrap Up:
1. Create a journal entry by writing or drawing about one connection students made between their personal experiences and the information presented in the text.
2. Each child’s entry could be put together in a book titled What We Know About ___________ and placed in the reading area for future reading.
## Sample E-T-R Lesson about Butterflies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Experience:</strong></th>
<th>Children share their experiences with butterflies. Encourage students to share physical characteristics, habitat, life cycle changes, and eating habits of butterflies. Record students’ experiences on poster paper.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Text:</strong></td>
<td>Read <em>Monarch Butterflies</em> by Gail Gibbons aloud to the students. Use questions or comments to emphasize the section of the text dealing with the life cycle changes of a butterfly (metamorphosis).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationship:</strong></td>
<td>Children discuss relationships between their experiences with butterflies and what the text said about them. Emphasize the relationships regarding life cycle changes of a butterfly. A great extension to this lesson would be to bring an insect cage into the classroom and observe the life cycle changes of a butterfly.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Other Nonfiction Practices for the Primary Classroom

**Informational Alphabet Books:**
After reading nonfiction texts on a particular subject, make a chart with the letters of the alphabet. For each letter, brainstorm something students learned about the subject that begins with that letter. For example, after reading about Australia, students may say, “A’ is for the Australian outback.” Next, students choose a letter that they would like to write about. Some students may choose a second letter in order address every letter of the alphabet. Each student is then responsible for making a page of the alphabet book, which will include the idea, a couple supporting facts, and a picture. For example, “A is for the Australian Outback. This is a very hot piece of land where many Aborigines live. The sand here is red and very dry.” When the pages are finished, compile them into a book for future reference and reading enjoyment.

**Nonfiction Books on Tape:**
Young students often enjoy listening to nonfiction books on tape as they follow along with a copy of the book. This allows children to hear nonfiction books read fluently. In addition, children can focus more on the comprehension of the text because they are not overwhelmed with the task of decoding each word. It is not necessary to purchase commercially-produced cassette tapes for this activity. Older, more advanced readers from the school may be willing to record the nonfiction books onto blank cassette tapes for younger students. Label each tape with the title of the book and the “reader’s” name. Then store in a large plastic bag with a copy of the book for student use.

**Magazine Subscriptions:**
Another way to incorporate nonfiction into the classroom is to subscribe to age-appropriate magazines providing informational reading. For some children, the colorful pictures and overall layout are less daunting than a book on the same topic. Many magazines contain charts, diagrams, graphs, maps, and other nonfiction features used in today’s world. Magazines often provide students with current events important to students their age. Some magazine titles appropriate for younger children are *Ranger Rick, Scholastic News, Sports Illustrated for Kids, National Geographic for Kids, Time for Kids, Discover, Zoobooks, Appleseeds* (a social studies magazine), *Ask* (a science magazine), and *Click* (a combination of science and history).
Nonfiction Retellings:
After reading a nonfiction text, students can give a retelling or oral recount of the information presented in the text. Retellings should capture the important events of a text and should not be exactly word-for-word from the book. With practice in retelling informational texts, many students remember more of what they read and are often able to make sense of the information. Students can retell to classmates or with the teacher on a more formal basis.

Narrative Information Books:
Narrative informational books are written in story form but also contain information about a particular subject. Many children enjoy these books as they offer elements of both the fictional and informational genre. Some narrative nonfiction books include *The Magic School Bus* series by Joanna Cole, *Snowflake Bentley* by Jacqueline Briggs Martin, *Postcards from Pluto: A Tour of the Solar System* by Loreen Leedy, and *The Popcorn Book* by Tomie DePaola.

Well-Balanced Classroom Library:
In order for children to become proficient in a variety of genres, students must have access to a well-balanced classroom library. Provide books from a wide range of topics, genres, and difficulty levels. In addition, some teachers pair nonfiction books with fictional ones on the same topic and store them in large zip-lock bags. Above all, children need time each day to self-select their own reading material from the classroom library.

Information Quilt:
After reading an informational book aloud, have students each design a quilt square representing information presented in the book. Children will write about something they learned in the book and draw a picture to illustrate the information. When all children have completed their square, share the information with the class and glue each square on a colored sheet of butcher paper resembling a quilt. Writing the title and author of the book is a great way to fill up any extra quilt squares.
Locating and Selecting Quality Nonfiction

1. Selecting Quality Nonfiction
2. Locating Quality Nonfiction
3. Suggested Nonfiction Authors
4. Suggested Nonfiction Titles
Many teachers are aware of the benefits of using nonfiction; however choosing quality nonfiction to meet the needs of younger readers can often be a daunting process. In the past, nonfiction titles were limited, especially for readers in the primary grades. Currently, hundreds of nonfiction books are published each year, which makes it even more important to know how to select the most effective books. Listed below are guidelines that have been recommended for selecting quality nonfiction.

1. **Authority of the author.** Check the authority of the author and determine if the author is qualified to write a book on that particular topic. Sometimes the author dedicates a section of the book to discuss the research involved prior to writing the book (Moss, 1995).

2. **Accuracy.** The accuracy of the text should be taken into consideration to ensure the facts remain true in our current society. New facts and information arise on a regular basis due in part to computers and other advancements in technology (Sudol & King, 1996; Moss, 1995; Moss, 2004).

3. **Accessibility.** It is necessary to make sure that books are at the appropriate reading level for their intended audience. Furthermore, select books that don’t overwhelm children by the amount of technical vocabulary included in the text (Sudol & King, 1996).

4. **Appropriateness.** Choose books that are age-appropriate and have relevance to children's lives. It is important to incorporate texts that are meaningful to children. For example, teachers probably would not read a book aloud about the Japanese Holocaust to kindergarteners, as the content is not appropriate for young students (Moss, 1995; Moss, 2004; Sudol & King, 1996).

5. **Appeal.** When choosing a nonfiction book for children, it is critical to choose a book with an appealing appearance. Many students select a book based on their perceptions of the cover and illustrations (Moss, 1995; Sudol & King, 1996).

6. **Text type.** Select the type of text that matches the interest and ability levels of the students. For some students, a magazine article may be the most effective way to communicate information on a certain topic, and for others it may be locating information on the Web, yet others find books as the most valuable tool for learning new information (Sudol & King, 1996).
7. **Recommendations.** Ask colleagues for recommendations of nonfiction titles that have been successful in their teaching experiences. In addition, ask students to name nonfiction books that were particularly interesting or helpful to them. While some suggest reading online reviews of books or searching the Web for titles that have received awards in categories specific to nonfiction (Sudol & King, 1996).
Locating quality nonfiction for the classroom may seem like a daunting process for many; however, there are awards given for the most distinguished nonfiction books each year. Browsing through these award-winning nonfiction titles may be a great place to start. Below are some web sites to check out:

**The Boston Globe-Horn Book Award.** This is awarded annually for outstanding nonfiction. [www.hbook.com](http://www.hbook.com)

**The Children’s Book Awards (Nonfiction for Young Readers Category).** This award is given annually to a top nonfiction author by the International Reading Association. [www.reading.org/awards/children.html](http://www.reading.org/awards/children.html)

**The Eve Pownell Award for Information Books.** The Children’s Book Council of Australia awards the top nonfiction children’s book written by an Australian each year. [www.cbc.org.au](http://www.cbc.org.au)

**The Orbis Pictus Award.** The Orbis Pictus is awarded annually by the National Council of Teachers of English. Up to five honor books are also awarded. [www.ncte.org/nctetoyou/2004/2004-orbis-pictus.shtml](http://www.ncte.org/nctetoyou/2004/2004-orbis-pictus.shtml)

**The Robert F. Sibert Information Book Award.** This award presented annually by the American Library Association to a distinguished author of children’s nonfiction. [www.ala.org](http://www.ala.org)

**The Washington Post-Children’s Book Guild Nonfiction Award.** This award is given annually to an author or illustrator who has made a difference in the nonfiction world. [www.childrensbookguild.org/2004award.htm](http://www.childrensbookguild.org/2004award.htm)
The following resources may also be helpful when locating nonfiction titles for classroom use:

**Library of Congress Online Catalog.** This site allows you to search the entire Library of Congress listings by author, title, illustrator, subject, publisher, date, or ISBN. http://catalog.loc.gov

**Bookfinder.** This site assists users in finding out-of-print or rare titles. A search is conducted based on the desired title or author. http://www.bookfinder.com

**Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People.** Each year the April/May addition of *Social Education* lists outstanding trade books (both fiction and nonfiction) contributing to the field of Social Studies education.

**Outstanding Science Trade Books for Children.** Each year the March addition of *Science and Children* lists notable trade books (both fiction and nonfiction) contributing to the field of Science education.

**Notable Children’s Books in the English Language Arts.** This list is compiled by the Children’s Literature Assembly of National Council of Teachers of English. The list includes outstanding fiction and nonfiction titles published in the previous year. www.childrensliteratureassembly.org/notable2005.htm
Though there are many nonfiction children’s book authors, the following is a list of nonfiction authors recommended by researchers in this field. The authors listed below have written quality informational books specifically for children in the elementary grades.

- Aliki
- Melvin Berger
- Franklyn Branley
- Joanna Cole
- Jean Craighead-George
- Arthur Dorros
- David Feldman
- Allan Fowler
- Rita Golden Gelman
- Gail Gibbons
- Linda Glaser
- Ruth Heller
- Patricia Lauber
- David Macaulay
- Sandra Markle
- Milton Meltzer
- Ann Morris
- Carolyn Otto
- Mary Pope Osborne
- Jerry Pallotta
- David Schwartz
- Seymour Simon
Suggested Nonfiction Titles

The following list contains book titles collected from a review of the literature on nonfiction reading in the primary grades. This list is definitely not inclusive, as there are many outstanding titles not mentioned on this list. However, it may be a great place to start when looking for great nonfiction read-alouds or books that may support a particular thematic unit.


CHAPTER FIVE
Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Summary
Numerous reading researchers express the importance of exposing children, beginning in the primary grades, to a wide range of genres, including nonfiction. It has been shown that young students as early as kindergarten can comprehend nonfiction text and many enjoy the informative nature of this genre. However, an overwhelming majority of the reading instruction done in the primary grades is linked to fictional text. All too often, schools wait to introduce nonfiction reading until the intermediate grades (Grades 3, 4, and 5), leaving students overwhelmed and frustrated by the new task. Yet much of this can be avoided by giving children opportunities to explore informational text in the early grades, providing them with the necessary tools to become proficient readers in a variety of genres.

The benefits of using nonfiction with primary students are numerous. First, teachers can better prepare young students for future reading tasks by incorporating nonfiction into their current reading programs. Second, nonfiction can serve as a “way in” to literacy for students who lack interest and motivation in other genres. Third, informational text often satisfies the curiosities of young minds, bursting with questions about the world around them. Fourth, incorporating nonfiction and other genres into the primary classroom can add to students’ overall literacy proficiency, often leading to well-rounded readers ready to meet the reading demands of today’s society. Finally, nonfiction reading can help build students’ knowledge base about the world, which often leads to increased vocabulary development and comprehension. With these benefits in
mind, teachers need to re-evaluate their current reading programs in order to ensure students are getting appropriate opportunities to become successful readers in today’s world.

Conclusions

Incorporating nonfiction in the primary grades has been shown to be beneficial to young students. However, nonfiction should not replace the narrative text already in place in many primary classrooms. Instead, researchers recommend giving children experiences with multiple genres, including both fiction and nonfiction.

The eight nonfiction reading strategies discussed in this manual include: (a) interactive read-alouds, (b) Venn diagrams, (c) K-W-L charts, (d) anticipation guides, (e) reciprocal teaching, (f) questioning the author, (g) sketch to stretch activities, and (h) experience-text-relationship techniques. These eight strategies can easily compliment any primary reading program, giving students experience with a genre that is often ignored until the older grades.

In addition to strategies teachers can use to incorporate nonfiction into the primary classroom, the manual also includes valuable resources for selecting and locating quality nonfiction, which is often a barrier for teachers using this genre with their students. Teachers can feel more at ease knowing they have a resource that will guide them to age-appropriate nonfiction. The easier it is for teachers to locate nonfiction, the more likely it will be that they implement this text in their classrooms, creating well-rounded readers prepared to tackle future reading demands.
Recommendations

The author offers several recommendations for primary teachers using the eight strategies for incorporating nonfiction into classrooms. Though all eight strategies can be beneficial for primary students, the author suggests introducing only one strategy at a time. After introducing the strategy, provide students with ample support and practice before beginning a new one. Students are more likely to use strategies they feel comfortable with rather than newly introduced ones. In addition, the author recommends incorporating these nonfiction strategies into the science and social studies curricula. Often, these subjects naturally lend themselves to nonfiction trade books related to a particular topic of study. Not only will this give students experience with expository text, it will also enrich their understanding of these often overwhelming content subjects.

Using nonfiction with primary students is a relatively new topic for reading researchers, leaving areas to still be investigated. For this reason, the author would like to see further research exploring the effects of language development on English-language learners when incorporating nonfiction into their reading program due to the concrete nature of informational text. The author would also like to see further research on how early exposure to nonfiction may effect test scores (such as the WASL) in the later grades.
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