

Making Informational Text Accessible: What is the Difference ?



Dr. Terri Beeler
Literacy Consultant
281-880-7323
terribeeler@sbcglobal.net

“In the Information Age the importance of being able to read and write informational texts critically and well cannot be overstated. Informational literacy is central to success, and even survival, in schooling, the workplace and the community.”

Nell Duke, Michigan State University

What's Involved in Comprehending ?

- Accuracy
- Fluency
- Vocabulary
- Prior knowledge
- Growing ability to infer and synthesize information
- A questioning stance
- Stamina
- Time ! (to read, write, grow)
- *Background knowledge is critical to comprehension.
The more you know, the more you know !
Inferring REQUIRES background knowledge.*

Why Read Informational Text?

- Concern that there is a scarcity of informational text used in primary grades
*There is no known reason as to why
No research evidence that children can't handle it or don't like it
No research evidence that children should first learn to read and then read to learn*
- Reading development is genre specific – reading fiction will not necessarily help you easily read a cookbook, computer manual or directions for programming the phone
- Young children learn both language AND content from informational text
- Informational text can support literacy development

- Kids who read a more diverse range of texts seem to have higher achievement
- Informational literacy is important in later schooling and in life
 - * *We are in an information age*
 - * *96% of our websites are expository text !*
 - * *The majority of reading and writing that adults do is informational/expository*
 - * *Academic achievement in a wide range of subjects depends in part on a prior knowledge base*

Nonfiction

Fountas, I. C. & Pinnell, G. S. (2001). Guiding readers and writers grades 3-6: Teaching, comprehension, genre, and content literacy. Heinemann: Portsmouth.
pp. 399-400.

Nonfiction is intended to provide factual information through text and visual images. A non-fiction text, whether it is a picture book or a longer text, focuses on a particular topic. The line between fiction and nonfiction is a fine one. Works of fiction often do include factual information, but the heart of the story has been fashioned in the author's imagination. Nonfiction texts, on the other hand, must be documented; the information is verifiable from other sources. Accuracy is of supreme importance in works of nonfiction.

Informational Texts

Informational texts contain ideas, facts, and principles related to the physical, biological, or social world. Informational texts may take many different forms: picture books, photo essays; chapter books, articles and essays, letters, diaries and journals, observational notes, factual references (almanacs, books of statistics, books of world records), brochures and manuals. The primary purpose is to communicate information.

Information books cross all areas of study in which readers are interested-geology, sports, religion, space, technology, history, animals, cooking, and so on. In the past, much of the content curriculum was delivered through textbooks, but in recent years the quality of information books has improved, and the number of informational books published has greatly increased (Tunnell and Jacobs 1997). These books often include beautiful art and other graphic features. In addition they provide timely, well-written information by qualified experts.

In general, textbooks are not considered literature and would not be part of literature

study. High-quality informational books and biographies, however, do have the qualities of literature, as well as special elements of their own. We consider them literature and a vital part of our literacy program.

High-quality informational texts are key to students' development of an important concept called *content literacy*. Content literacy involves the strategies required to read, comprehend, and write informational texts in a variety of subjects. Different styles and ways of organizing texts are used for different subjects. For example, a historical account of the Civil War is organized differently from a botanical guide to the different varieties of mountain wildflowers. The vocabulary of the two books differs, as does the ways in which the two authors use language.

Content literacy involves knowing what to expect—anticipating the kinds of organizational structures the reader might encounter. Content literacy also involves understanding the kinds of graphic features the reader needs to interpret, as well as vocabulary specific to the topic. The reader uses the text's organization, language, and visual features in a unified way to derive meaning. In other words, students must learn how to read history, biology, environmental science, geographical descriptions, and other kinds of texts.

Learning how to read informational texts involves strategies such as gathering information, summarizing and synthesizing information, and making connections to prior knowledge. Readers of informational texts must analyze where information is located within the overall organizational framework. They must also be critical, asking such questions as "Is the information documented? Do the ideas fit together?"

***What is informational text? Non-fiction?
Expository ? What about a picture storybook
that is factual ?**

Kinds of Informational Texts

- **Concept** – information on the basic characteristics of a group of objects or abstract idea. Readers will see patterns and make generalizations.
- **Identification/Field Guide** – present and identify members of a class of animals, plants or objects. Illustrations and captions carry most of the information.

- **Photo essay** – books in which the photos and text work together to help the reader construct the meaning. They document the life experiences and events of people and animals.
- **Life-cycle** – books that follow the life cycle of people, animals or plants. Also include inanimate beings such as mountains or islands.
- **Experiment, activity, craft, how to do** – following directions to achieve a specific goal
- **Documents, journals, diaries and albums** – accounts of lives and events. The topics are often researched by an author and diary/journal entries may be included.
- **Survey** – “all about” books which introduce the reader to a specific topic. They usually begin with a general overview of a topic then move to representative subtopics.
- **Reference** – encyclopedias, dictionaries, atlases, indexes, directories, fact books, almanacs – books offering facts and information usually in a user friendly format.
- **Informational picture storybooks** – look and read like picture book. They are written in narrative style with factual information carried along by fictional characters.

What do children need to know ?

Pictures/Visual as Sources of Information

Covers
 End pages
 Format
 Captions, illustrations, photographs
 Labels
 Diagrams
 Time lines
 Maps
 Charts

Text features as sources of information

Table of contents
Glossaries
Pronunciation guides
Bibliographies/recommendations for further reading
Introduction
Preface
Author/Illustrator notes
Appendix
Index
Sidebars, bullets, insets, Headings

Text structures to assist understanding

Enumerative structure	Compare-contrast structure
Sequential structure	Cause-effect structure
Chronological order	Narrative structure

Recipe for Informational Literacy

Deleted: ¶

Measure 2 heaping cups of curiosity

Add 1 caring teacher

Stir gently with interesting information

Allow to steep in student generated questions

Blend in time to read and time to write

Sprinkle generously with think-alouds, reading strategies and craft lessons for informational writing

Add a dash of hands-on experience

Mix thoroughly with small group instruction and assessment

Whisk in a rich mix of tools for gaining meaning

Simmer in an atmosphere where information is celebrated all day

Spread over a lifetime of reading and writing

Linda Hoyt, *Make It Real: Strategies for Success with Informational Text*

How do we teach so children can Learn to Read and Read to Learn *at the same time* ?

- *Gradual release of responsibility*
 - Explicitly demonstrate how comprehending strategies such as determining importance, summarizing, synthesizing, gathering information are important to the comprehending of non-fiction text
 - Explicitly demonstrate the use of text features and text structures and their importance to comprehending
 - Establish tasks that support explicit practice of using text structures and features in connection with comprehension of topic/text
- *Readalouds – Shared Reading – Guided Reading – Writing*
- *Should relate to rest of day – not an isolated piece*
- *When sharing info text, take as much time to talk as to read*
 - We make sense of our world through talking
 - Research suggests that children interact more with informational text than narrative text during a read-aloud
 - Raises the ceiling on children's listening comprehension
- *Non-fiction texts should be read as often as fiction (BALANCE !)*
- *Help children acquire reading AND language vocabulary (background knowledge)*
- *Reading non-fiction aloud sets the stage for comprehension with less support*

Strategies for Using Informational Text

Informational Read-alouds/Think-alouds

Shared Reading using big books and transparencies made from books

Read, Cover, Remember, Retell

1. Get a partner
2. **Read** about as much as you think you can cover with your hand.
3. **Cover** the text with your hand.
4. Focus on **Remembering** what you read. (quiet thinking)
5. **Tell** your partner what you remember (peek back if you need to – it isn't a test!)
6. Read some more and follow the steps again.

Beat the Teacher

Students work in small groups to read short passages of text, stopping to generate questions. The goal is to generate questions that the teacher must answer. The teachers also reads the text and generates her own questions. Then teacher takes seat and the students take turns asking her their questions. If she answers a question correctly, then she gets to ask students a question. (Points can be given). Be sure to model different levels of questions from literal to inferential. Extend with showing how text is used to find answers to the questions.

Alpha box

Create a grid of 24 equal size boxes either for individual use on computer or on chart paper for group. Each square will represent one letter of alphabet with last square being X,Y,Z. Prior to beginning reading on new topic, insert words that reflect prior knowledge of topic. For example prior to reading a book on spiders – in the “E” box, a child might write “eight legs”. Or in the “W” box a child might write a fact about webs. Words/phrases can be added to the boxes as child reads text. Additional points of importance, inferences or conclusions can be added after the reading. Model with a chart version first demonstrating the possibilities for filling in the grid.

Key Words

Demonstrate for students how to read a short piece of text then identify a key word or phrase that summarizes that segment of text. Using post-its, chart paper for group or individual pieces of paper, keep track of the words/phrases. On finishing the selection the words collected should form a summary of the important ideas of the text. They can be used to write summary or for oral retelling of information.

Learning to Present Both Sides

As children move towards becoming productive citizens who make daily decisions that impact their own lives and the lives of others, it is important to be able to consider an issue from both sides. For this task, present a statement and have students work independently, with a partner or in a small group, to argue both sides of the issue.

For example:

Learning to Question a Statement

In an Information Age such as we are experiencing, it is important not to accept everything at face value. Children are presented with a statement and asked to construct possible questions about the issue.

For example:

Comparing Fiction and Non-Fiction

Using several texts, both fiction and non-fiction, on the same topic or theme, sort out facts from fiction and from opinions.

For example:

Text Feature Scavenger Hunt

1. Find and check out the index. How many pages does it have ? Locate a key topic that has several pages of information. Find a topic that has only a single page listed.
2. Look through the Table of Contents. Where did you find it ? How is the book divided up ? What chapters look interesting to you ?

3. Find the glossary. Where is it located ? What information is in the glossary ? Write down two words that are familiar and two that are unknown. Find those words in the chapters of the book. How can a glossary help you ?
4. List the information found on the first page of a chapter.
5. How does the text show that some words are important ? (ex: bold print) Find 3 words in a chapter that seem important. Write them down, find out what each means and write that meaning. What are the ways you can find out the meaning of a word in this book ?
6. Find a photograph within the book. Note the page number. Study the photo and read the caption. Write what you learned. How does this photo help you understand the information in the text ?
7. Find a graph, chart, diagram or map. Note the page number. Study this feature and write what you can learn from it.
8. Flip through a couple more chapters in the book. What other features do you find ? How do they help you understand the information in the chapter ?
9. Look at the last page of the chapter. What did you find ? How will it help you with learning what is in the chapter ? Would it be helpful to look at this page *before* reading the chapter ?
10. Skim through a chapter. Is there anything that seems to confuse you ? How can being familiar with the way nonfiction text “works” help you in learning ?

Scavenger Hunt adapted from: Robb, L. *Teaching Reading in Social Studies, Science, and Math*

OTHER IDEAS:

Professional References Cited

(A few of many good resources available on this topic)

Bamford, R.A. and J. V. Kristo, Eds. 2000. *Checking out Non-fiction K-8: Good Choices for Best Learning*. Norwood, MA: Christopher Gordon.

Duke, N. K. and V. S. Bennett-Armistead 2003. *Reading and Writing Informational Text in the Primary Grades*. Scholastic Teaching Resources.

Fletcher, R. and J. Portalupi, 2001. *Nonfiction Craft Lessons: Teaching Informational Writing K-8*. York, ME ; Stenhouse.

Hoyt, L. 2002. *Make It Real: Strategies for Success with Informational Texts*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Hoyt, L., Mooney, M., Parkes, B. (Eds.) 2003. *Exploring Informational Texts: From Theory to Practice*. Portsmouth, NH : Heinemann.

Robb, L. 2003. *Teaching Reading in Social Studies, Science and Math*. Scholastic Professional Books.

Children's Informational Text

Choosing Informational Text – Things to Consider

- Overall visual appeal
- How the format lends to accessing the information
- Accuracy of content and credibility of author * (the rest doesn't matter without accuracy of the content !)
- Style and language of writing
- Vocabulary
- Organization of content and use of text structures and features

Authors of Informational Text Worth Looking At: (This is a sampling – not a complete list !)

Aliki
Melvin Berger
Franklyn Branley
Lynne Cherry
Joanna Cole
Allan Fowler
Jean Fritz
Gail Gibbons
Ruth Heller
Barnabas and Annabel Kindersley
Kathleen Krull
Patricia Lauber
Milton Meltzer
Ann Morris
J. Nixon
Mary Pope Osborne
Jerry Pallotta
Seymour Simon

And a few more:

Axelrod, A.	<i>Pigs Will be Pigs: Fun with Math and Money</i>
Balestrino, P.	<i>The Skeleton Inside You</i>
Branley, F.	<i>The Planets in our Solar System</i>
Bustard, A.	<i>T is for Texas</i>
Christelow, E.	<i>What Do Authors Do ?</i>
Cowley, J.	<i>Red-Eyed Tree Frog</i>
Davis, K.	<i>Don't Know Much about the Solar System</i>
Ehlert, L.	<i>Red Leaf, Yellow Leaf</i>
Farrell, E.	<i>Young Jackie Robinson: Baseball Hero</i>
Hall, Z.	<i>The Apple Pie Tree</i>
Hall, Z.	<i>It's Pumpkin Time</i>
Halpern, J.	<i>A Look at Spiders</i>
Jacobs, W.	<i>Ellis Island: New Hope in a New Land</i>
Jean, P.	<i>Insects that Bother Us</i>
Levine, E.	<i>If Your Name was Changed at Ellis Island</i>
Martin, J. B.	<i>Snowflake Bentley</i>
Mitton, J.	<i>Zoo in the Sky</i>

Parker, S. *It's an Ant's Life (also Frog's Life)*
Pringle, L. *An Extraordinary Life: The Story of the Monarch Butterfly*
Ryan, P. *The Flag We Love*
Schanzer, R. *How Ben Franklin Stole the Lightning*
Stott, C. *I Wonder Why Stars Twinkle*
Sweeney, J. *Me on the Map (and others)*
Templeton, F. *Cat Hiss-tory*
Tsuchiya, Y. *Faithful Elephants*

****Many lists available in the professional books listed in Professional References Cited section above.***

Aa	Bb	Cc	Dd	Ee	Ff
Gg	Hh	Ii	Jj	Kk	Ll
Mm	Nn	Oo	Pp	Qq	Rr
Ss	Tt	Uu	Vv	Ww, Xx	Yy, Zz

Good Readers of Informational Text

- Have clear goals for their reading
- Look over the text before reading, notice illustrations, headings, charts, etc.
- Activate prior knowledge
- Make predictions
- Use meaning and expect the text to make sense
- Understand whether or not comprehension is occurring
- Make connections: text to self, text to text, text to world
- Create visual images
- Consciously use text features (pictures, headings, captions, boldface type)
- Draw inferences, conclusions
- Ask questions as they read
- Read different kinds of informational texts differently
- Skim and scan to recheck information
- Locate information
- Adjust reading rate to match the demands of the text
- Make a plan when reading informational texts
- Identify important ideas and words
- Consciously shift strategies to match purpose
- Retell, summarize, synthesize
- Use a variety of fix-up strategies
 - √ Read on
 - √ Backtrack
 - √ Context clues
 - √ Make substitutions
 - √ Look at word parts: beginnings, endings, chunks

This was adapted from the work of Pearson and Duke 1999; Keene and Zimmerman 1996.