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The LeafLIT

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NON-FICTION – A SCHOOL / LIFE SKILL

By Robbin Pryor

As teachers, we all know the main point of reading is comprehension. The problem is how do we get the students to internalize information, extrapolate this information to knowledge, analyze, and evaluative components? When introducing students to nonfiction text it should generate interest, increase understanding of the content area, and develop critical thinking skills. Okay, now that the buzz words have been used AND before you completely go to sleep— What do you do in your classroom to promote the use and understanding of non-fiction?

For students to be successful academically, the important skill is reading for understanding in nonfiction. Non fiction is more than a science or social studies book. It is recipes, manuals, how to instructions, articles, documentaries, and research on the computer, etc.

In classrooms, review the types of nonfiction books and fictional books that are available. Many classes have volumes of animal and science books. The publishers are beginning to address the need for primary biographies and history books.

Now that we have reviewed our books, what exactly is the next step? Glad you asked! Pick a fiction book that would lead into non-fiction. The use of a familiar fiction introduces the topic which generates confidence in exploring the less familiar area of non-fiction. This facilitates interest and understanding of the content. The class would determine the elements of fiction and nonfiction. The students have now established a non threatening basis of prior knowledge. They have solid information to base what they know and would like to know on a K-W-L chart. This makes what they are learning relevant. Chances are they will remember the information longer and become more inquisitive towards research, whether it is scientific, historical, or literary.

Resources—

Is That a Fact? Teaching Non-fiction Writing K-3 by Tony Stead 2002

Gotcha! Nonfiction Book talks to Get Kids Excited About Reading – by Kathleen A. Baxter and Marcia Agness Kochel 1999



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Nonfiction Selections

By Michell Guldner

Wading through the new wave of nonfiction materials trying to determine what “has it all” for a price we can afford is like eating at the buffet when you’re on a diet, it’s not as easy as you would think. Here are a few tips when selecting nonfiction material for your class/grade level /school.

Relevant topic: If it isn’t educational, informative, persuasive, or historical then pass it up. Cute and trendy will not last long enough to justify spending the money.

Interest levels: Choose topics and subject matter that the students would be interested in reading. Take out the student inventories you did at the beginning of the year (Getting to Know You sheets) and find out what interests your students have outside of school. If it’s gross or I just don’t “get it” then I know the majority of my boys will love it.

Readability: Nonfiction text for most students is at a lower level than their reading level. To determine the levels, check out “Reality Checks” by Tony Stead. The assessment chapter (10) shares how to determine the best levels for your students.

Objectives and benchmarks: Apply the old saying, kill two birds with one stone. Look at your CEF and find your objectives for Science and Social Studies. Pick topics that relate to what you need to cover in these areas to choose your selected nonfiction materials. Reading and Writing across the Curriculum doesn’t have to be put on the back burner for when you have time.

Nonfiction Activities:

by Michell Guldner

Nonfiction Features Reference book

Create a student reference book on the common nonfiction features such as; labels, captions, maps, types of print, graphs, close-ups, cutaways, photographs, table of contents, index, & glossary. Use old Scholastic Readers, Weekly Readers, Time for Kids...to cut up as the examples of the nonfiction features (also called nonfiction conventions). Make a book by folding several sheets of paper and stapling it together, write each feature and the definition or purpose of use on a page, and glue an example of it on the page.

Nonfiction Scavenger Hunt

Have the students go on a scavenger hunt using their textbooks. List all the nonfiction features on the board. Split the class into teams and see how many examples of nonfiction features they can find. The first time they find a feature they need to record the page number after that, every time they come across that feature again they put a tally mark. The team that finds most examples of nonfiction features wins!

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