

Nonfiction Reading – Why Bother

Make a list of everything you have read and written in the past 24 hours. Ninety percent of all adult reading and writing is for information gathering. Does your list come close? Our days are consumed with nonfiction information; however, in school, 80 percent of students' reading time is fiction. Nonfiction strategies are foundation skills needed throughout students' school and adult lives.

Informational Texts:

- Are key to success in later schooling
- Are ever present in the larger society (Kamil & Lane [1998] stated that “96 percent of the text on the World Wide Web is expository.”)
- Are preferred reading material for some students (For our “info kids,” this is the genre that turns them into readers.)
- Address students' interests and questions (Guthrie, et al. [1996] found that “real questions tend to lead to higher achievement and motivation.”)
- Build knowledge and promote discovery of the natural and social world and comprehension of subsequent texts increases with background knowledge
- Develop students' visual literacy as well as their vocabulary
- Build critical reading and writing skills with the need for logical, concise organization of facts

Nonfiction Matters by Stephanie Harvey includes a list of excellent questions that we as administrators and teachers should ask ourselves. *Ideas for administrators to do to encourage nonfiction are in italics.*

- Do we provide enough instruction in nonfiction reading and writing? How much is enough? *Demonstrate strategies for classes, provide professional books, start a study group.*
- Do we read nonfiction aloud? *I am constantly saying, “I found this great nonfiction book/nonfiction picture book. Can I come read it aloud to your class?”*
- Do we have a sufficient amount of good quality nonfiction at our disposal, in our classroom libraries, in our school libraries, in our resources? Do they tie in adequately with our mandated curriculum? *Set aside an amount of money for teachers to use just for nonfiction books. Start each meeting with a book talk about a nonfiction book.*
- How do we fit in nonfiction when we don't have enough time for everything else? *It's incorporated into our ELA curriculum. Every grade does a research report to cover reading and writing of nonfiction.*
- Do we include enough short text in our nonfiction reading program (i.e., magazines, newspapers, columns, essays, manuals, etc.)? *Magazine subscriptions for the classroom encourage nonfiction reading. An article is an excellent short text to use in reading and writing workshop.*
- Do we see the value to the overall curriculum of our teaching nonfiction reading and writing? *Have a Wear-An-Amazing-Fact Day. I learned many new things from my students that day!*

Nonfiction reading and writing helps students learn, obtain, and use information effectively. In turn, this will develop their skills as students.

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