

Determining Importance in Non-Fiction Mini-Lessons

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Based on Debbie Miller's *Reading With Meaning*

Materials Needed: Non-fiction texts about Dinosaurs, Flight, Reptiles, Biographies, Animals, Cars and Trucks, Magazines, Field Guides, First Discovery Books, Newspapers, Maps and Atlases, Big Cats, Disasters, and more.

Charts to Make:

My Wonderings (Day 1)

T Chart-*Nonfiction is not.../Non fiction is...* (Day 2)

T Chart-*I predict _____/What's the thinking behind my prediction?* (Day 3&4)

Venn Diagram-*Fiction/Nonfiction* (Day 5) (pg. 146)

Words that Signal I'm Learning Something New

What do we know about nonfiction conventions?

Background Information:

If you have not already spent time learning how readers identify key themes in stories, make predictions about the stories' organization, sequence, content and characters, then take a day review how readers use features of fiction to distinguish important from unimportant information in stories. Do not assume that just because children know how to read and understand fiction, that they can read and understand informational books, too. In these mini-lessons, you will explicitly teach them the difference.

Week 1: Fiction vs. Nonfiction

Day 1

Lay out a sea of nonfiction books about snakes, dolphins, gemstones, sharks, kittens, puppies, wolves, the ocean, shipwrecks, the human body, flowers, space, earthquakes, astronauts, cowboys, ballerinas, dinosaurs, soccer, Tiger Woods, volcanoes, bugs, and big trucks for free exploration and for something to build on when explicit teaching begins. Capitalize on their questions, and have them record them on index cards. Either use individuals Wonder Boxes, or Wonder Envelopes or a class Wonder Jar. You may model how you "skim" through the books to generate a few questions of your own. "Why are some twisters small and other's big?" "How do wolves catch elk?" "Why is the sky blue?" "Why do dogs have wet noses?" Wrap up this lesson by explaining that one of the main differences between fiction and non-fiction, is that non-fiction books give us information that is true.

Day 2

Using the text, *Grandfather's Journey* by Allen Say, ask "*What type of text do you predict this is?*" (*Fiction*) "*Knowing that it's fiction, how might you expect the story to be organized?*" Listen for: beginning, middle, end, setting, characters, a problem, events connected to the problem, and a resolution. Ask children to make some

predictions about what the story is going to be about. *“Just as with narrative text, expository text has predictable characteristics and features you can count on before you read which allows you to construct meaning more easily as you read.”* Now hold up, *Bugs! Bugs! Bugs!* by Jennifer Dussling. “What do you notice about this text?” Compliment them on noticing that this kind of text is organized differently than fiction. Tell them “you won’t find characters, problems, or resolutions either. Instead, these kinds of books—you already know them as nonfiction—are organized around specific topics and main ideas, and they try to teach you something. Nonfiction writing gives you information that is true. Let’s read it and see what we can learn...”

Day 3

Talk with children about how they can use what they know about this type of text to make predictions about its content—what the text might teach them. Use prior knowledge of fiction story features and fiction content to teach children to make expectations of nonfiction texts as well. “When readers read nonfiction, they make predictions about the text, too. But they don’t make predictions about the kinds of things they will expect to happen, they make predictions about the kinds of things they expect to learn. Use a book about spiders to teach children that when reading nonfiction they will activate their schema and background knowledge to make predictions about what they’ll learn in nonfiction text and what they know about the type of text they are about to read.

Day 4

Using two or three other nonfiction texts, make predictions about each story will teach you based on your schema and what you know already, and what’s in your mental files about that topic. “I’m predicting that this story will be about different types of bats in the world, and that maybe I’ll learn where they live, what they eat, their life cycles, and even which ones are dangerous to humans.” Features to point out would be the title, the photographs on the cover, the table of contents, the headings, the index, explaining how these features help me make predictions about the text. Do the same with one other book.

Day 5

Ask the students to help you make predictions. Release responsibility by:

- Asking children to bring a nonfiction book they haven’t read to the rug, E2E, K2K with a partner, make predictions about what they expect to learn
- Spreading fiction and nonfiction materials out on the rug, with a partner, get two or three ask themselves, “Is this fiction or nonfiction and how do we know?”
- Asking children to bring a nonfiction book and a fiction book to the rug, get into pairs and create a Venn Diagram that shows the two books’ differences and similarities.

We then create one large diagram that combines everyone’s thinking.

Day 6

Begin the lesson by sharing an interesting article from National Geographic or a book about sharks. Think aloud and share inner voice comments as you read. After reading the interesting facts, verbalize comments such as "Wow!"... "That's amazing!..." "I never knew that!"... "And get this..."... "I didn't know that either." The point of this lesson is to listen to your inner voice (and outer voice) ...these words signal you're learning something new. Let students try it as they want to discover their inner voice, too. Record the words that help them recognize they're learning something new on chart paper. Optional: Record new learning on sticky notes as NL and then just write the most important part.

Day 7

Today you will begin Convention Notebooks (CN). For the next 15 days, you will focus on a different feature of nonfiction text. By focusing on teaching the features, the children will determine importance and construct meaning by paying close attention to features such as photographs, diagrams, captions, and comparisons. Each day you will explicitly teach them what nonfiction conventions are, what kinds of information these conventions give us, and how they help us determine what is important in a text. CN will have 12 pieces of blank white paper and you can use the provided cover on cardstock or students may create their own cover with handprinted title with construction paper front and back cover. Today students will get CN and add title. Begin with Comparisons. Search your nonfiction library for 5 or 6 books that make comparisons, flag the pages with sticky notes, locate the comparisons and read the surrounding text aloud. But noticing and naming nonfiction conventions are not enough, also think aloud about how they help us as readers, think aloud about the purpose of each one. Children can either find examples from the classroom library or create comparisons of their own, and record one in their CN. For the example of each feature, students should record in the CN, write the title of the book where the example is found, and the page number. Daily, share children's learning in small groups and record on a two column anchor chart headed "What do we know about nonfiction conventions?"

Day 7 (cont.'d)

Comparisons - Help the reader understand the size of one thing by comparing it to the size of something familiar (a scissor is as big as a child's hand, p. 153)

Day 8

Labels - Help the reader identify a picture or photograph and/or its parts

Day 9

Photographs - Help the reader understand exactly what something looks like

Day 10

Captions - Help the reader better understand a picture or photograph

Week 3: Convention Notebooks (cont.'d)
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Day 11

Cutaways - Help the reader understand something by looking at it from the inside or from a different, sometimes 3-D, perspective

Day 12

Maps - Help the reader understand where things are in the world

Day 13

Types of Print - Help the reader by signaling, "Look at me! I'm important!"

Day 14

Text Bubbles - Help the reader see what's important by appearing in a box or bubble.

Day 15

Close-ups - Help the reader see details in something small

Week 4: Convention Notebooks (cont.'d)
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Day 16

Tables of Contents - Help the reader identify key topics in the book in the order they are presented

Day 17

Index - An alphabetical list of almost everything covered in the text, with page numbers

Day 18

Glossary - Helps the reader define words contained in the text

Day 19

Pronunciation Parentheses - Helps the reader pronounce difficult words that help with understanding of the context of the word.

Day 20

Graphs - Help the reader see the important information in a more visually pictorial way instead of reading the information in a paragraph format.

Convention notebooks not only build background information for text features that children encounter in their reading, but they also can be used as resources when they synthesize information in order to research questions. The notebooks help children think through which conventions would showcase their information best.

Week 5: Locating Specific Information

Day 21

Throughout this study of questioning and nonfiction, ask children to compile Wonder Cards in their own Wonder Box or the class Wonder Jar. Every week, pull one out and model for students how you would search for the answer. Model what we do when we want to find out specific information. Show them how to think aloud about certain questions:

- What do I already know about the topic?
- What type of book or other source will help me best?
- Where will I find the information?
- How is the information organized in the source? How will I go about locating what I need?

Then, after I've looked through the sources of information:

- What did I learn? How can I synthesize my learning for myself and others?