

Introducing the 5 Kinds of Nonfiction Children's Books

5 Kinds of Nonfiction



This activity for grades 3-8 can help students begin to learn the characteristics of the 5 Kinds of Nonfiction. It will also provide practical experience interacting with books from each of the categories.



Organize students into small groups and invite each team to gather a variety of nonfiction books on a single topic from the school library. After the children have sorted the books into at least three categories that make sense to them, compare the criteria each group used. Be sure to let the class know that each group's set of criteria is valid and well thought out.

Next, introduce the 5 Kinds of Nonfiction classification system. After sharing several books that fit each category, read aloud sections of books that are about the same topic but represent different book types. One possible text set is:

- [*City Hawk: The Story of Pale Male*](#) by Megan McCarthy (narrative)
- [*Feathers: Not Just for Flying*](#) by Melissa Stewart (expository literature)
- [*Penguins*](#) by Seymour Simon (traditional)
- [*Eyewitness Books: Bird*](#) by David Burnie (browseable)
- [*National Geographic Kids Bird Guide of North America*](#) by Jonathan Alderfer (active)

Ask students to compare how the books present information. Is the focus broad or is a specific concept being discussed? What kind of text features does each book include? What kind of text structure, writing style, and craft moves does the author employ? Does the writing have a distinct voice? What similarities and differences do students notice across the categories?

Finally, give each team a copy of the Category Feature Cards below. After students take a few minutes to review the information, send the groups back to the stacks to gather a selection of nonfiction books on a new topic. (Asking students to gather a new set of books rather than re-sort their original pile reinforces the idea that there are many ways to sort books and that there was nothing “wrong” with their initial classification.)

Invite each team to sort the books into the five types—narrative, expository literature, traditional, browseable, and active. Did they find examples of all five kinds? If not, can they explain why? (For example, some topics may not lend themselves to active titles or a narrative approach.)

Category Feature Cards

You can enlarge these cards by dragging on the lower right corner.

Traditional Nonfiction



- Survey (all about) books
- Overview of a topic
- Part of a large series
- Clear, straightforward language
- Expository writing style
- Description text structure

Developed by children's book author Melissa Stewart. For more information, please visit www.melissa-stewart.com

Browseable Nonfiction



- Eye-catching design, lavishly illustrated
- Short blocks of straightforward text
- Can be read cover to cover or by skipping around
- Great for shared reading
- Expository writing style
- Description text structure

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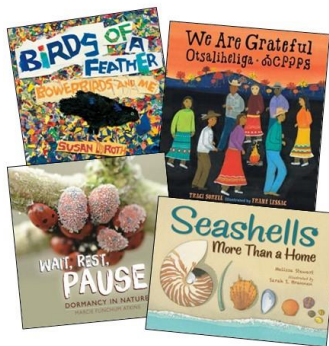
Narrative Nonfiction



- Narrative writing style
- Tells a story or conveys an experience
- Real characters, scenes, dialog, narrative arc
- Strong voice and rich, engaging language
- Chronological sequence structure
- Ideal for biographies and historical events

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Expository Literature



- Expository writing style
- Specialized topic presented creatively
- Strong voice and rich, engaging language
- Innovative format
- Carefully chosen text structure
- Ideal for STEM concepts

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Active Nonfiction



- Highly interactive and/or teaches skills for engaging in an activity
- How-to guides, field guides, cookbooks, craft books
- Clear, straightforward language
- Expository writing style

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