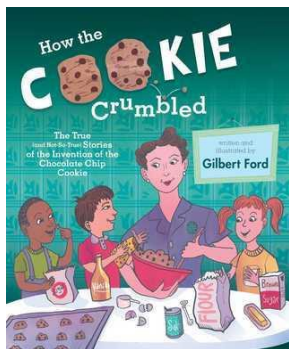
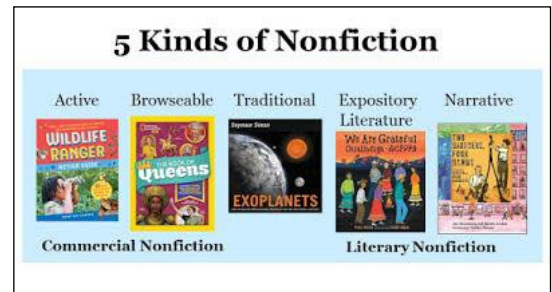


## Exploring Active Nonfiction Through the Ages (with Chocolate Chip Cookies)

This activity was developed by teacher-librarian Tom Bober. Captain Elementary School, Clayton, MO

I am a fan of Melissa’s 5 Kinds of Nonfiction as a way to help students think about and share the nonfiction they like to read and write. I’m also a believer in using historical documents as jumping-off points. When I was able to combine them in a recent lesson, the learning was powerful.



After reading Gilbert Ford’s book, *How the Cookie Crumbled*, I became interested in the original chocolate chip cookie recipe by Ruth Wakefield and other cookie recipes from the time. Looking at their structure, the recipes were presented very differently from recipes we work with today. I thought it would be an interesting exploration for my students.

We began with an excerpt from Ford’s book. As I passed around a 1937 cookbook with the original chocolate chip cookie recipe, we brainstormed what ingredients are common in many baking recipes. As students shared their background knowledge, I helped to organize their comments.

Flour, sugar, and butter were common. Baking soda, baking powder, and yeast were used to help baked items rise. Vanilla, zest, and almond were used for flavors. We labeled “wet” and “dry” ingredients. We listed what we described as “fillers” like chocolate chips or candies.

Then we looked at cookbooks that were on the shelves in our library. I asked the students how all of that information was shared and organized in these recipes. Students pointed out elements that they see in much of the active nonfiction they read:

—Numbered step-by-step directions

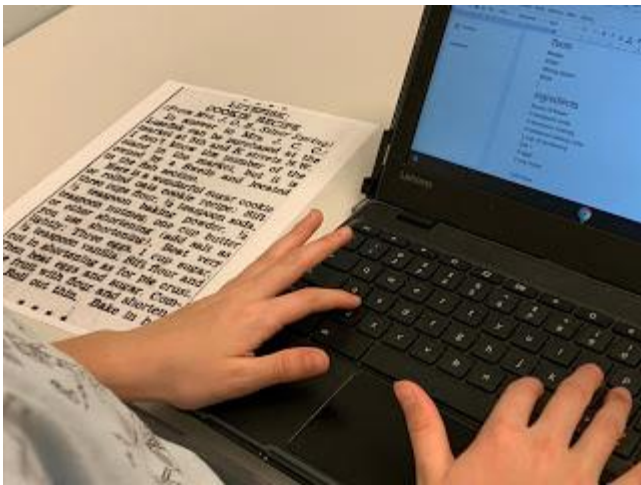


—Photos showing what steps look like

—Lists of items needed (in cookbooks, typically supplies and ingredients)

Then I shared several cookie recipes that appeared in newspapers in the early 1900s. I found them by doing a simple search in Chronicling America, a database of more than 16 million digitized and searchable pages of American newspapers dating from 1789 to 1963. My search included the years 1900 to 1920 using the keywords “cookie recipe.” Search results show thumbnails of the newspaper pages with keywords highlighted.

After each student had chosen one recipe, I asked, “How is this recipe structurally different from the ones you might see today?” They pointed back to the list we had created. Most of the historical recipes didn’t have identifiable steps. None had photos. The ingredients were included in the directions, but not listed at the beginning.



Then I gave the students a challenge: Take the recipe from 100 years ago and re-write it to look more like a recipe we would see today—more like active nonfiction. Some worked in pairs or small groups. Others decided to tackle the challenge on their own.

The students quickly realized that there were no supplies listed. They had to determine what those would be through the actions described in the recipe and by using current cookbooks for clues. Other problems were not so easily solved. Some ingredients didn’t have measured amounts. One recipe didn’t provide an oven temperature.

Noticing those missing bits of information (even if there were no apparent answers) showed me that the students recognized the importance of those details in the current active nonfiction cookbooks they were using as mentor texts. It also revealed their understanding of the structure and organization of that type of nonfiction. It certainly is an experience that we will revisit in the library.

## 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

Developed by children's book author Melissa Stewart. For more information, please visit [www.melissa-stewart.com](http://www.melissa-stewart.com)