

What's Gateway Nonfiction?

According to Jonathan Hunt, Coordinator of Library Services in San Diego, California, and former member of the Newbery, Caldecott, Printz, and *Los Angeles Times* Book Award committees, "gateway nonfiction" is a theoretical group of books that can form a bridge between the browseable books that captivate elementary-aged kids and the more rigorous nonfiction texts students encounter in middle school and high school.

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

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

Hunt believes that we need to clearly identify the characteristics of such books and publish more of them, and he certainly isn't alone.

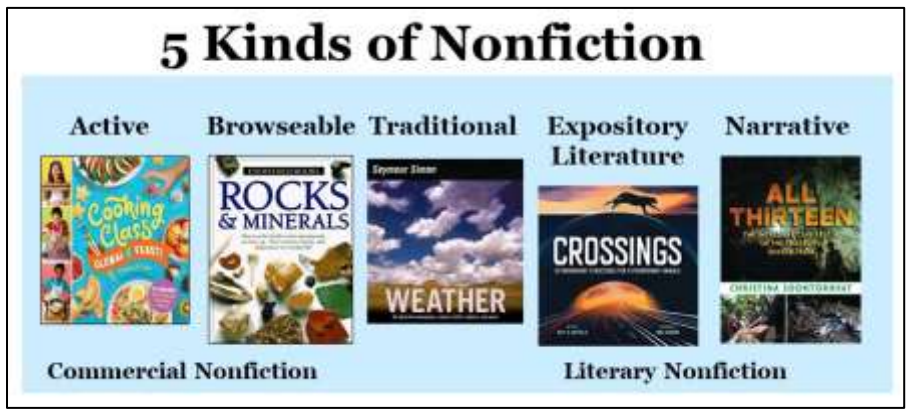
Active Nonfiction



- 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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In [this 2013 School Library Journal article](#), nonfiction author and thought leader Marc Aronson shares some ideas about the books he thinks could constitute gateway nonfiction. Basically, he's describing what Marlene Correia and I call active nonfiction in our book [5 Kinds of Nonfiction: Enriching Reading and Writing Instruction with Children's Books](#).



While Marlene and I agree that active books could bridge the gap for some readers, more and more, we’re leaning toward high-interest titles that are a blend of narrative nonfiction and expository literature as the best way to help the majority of upper elementary readers transition to more sophisticated long-form nonfiction titles.

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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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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Why do we consider these blended books prime candidates for the designation “gateway nonfiction”? Because they have traits that appeal to a broad cross-section of students.

A growing body of research shows that some children have a natural affinity for stories and storytelling (fiction and narrative nonfiction), while others have a clear preference for expository writing. And some students enjoy both writing styles equally. As a result, books that combine expository and narrative text have something for everyone, AND they can help all children stretch and grow as readers.

The expository sections of high-quality, high-interest blended books will captivate fact-loving kids. The clear, straightforward explanations will feel comfortable and familiar to them, giving

these students the confidence and motivation to tackle the narrative sections. And once these info-kids learn to access and enjoy narrative text, they can discover how characters—both real and imagined—exist in the world and successfully overcome challenges.

Similarly, young narrative lovers will be drawn to the story-rich sections of blended books, inspiring them to do the work necessary to digest and comprehend the expository passages. As a result, they'll be better equipped to wrangle the complex expository texts they'll encounter in middle school and beyond.

So regardless of a student's natural reading preference, blended books that mix narrative and expository writing styles can help them develop the skills to successfully interact with a broad range of complex texts.

Here's a list of info-licious books that integrate narrative and expository writing styles.

Animals to the Rescue! Amazing True Stories from Around the World by Sandra Markle (Millbrook Press, 2021)

Giant Squid by Candace Fleming (Roaring Brook, 2016)

The Great Monkey Rescue: Saving the Golden Lion Tamarins by Sandra Markle (Millbrook Press, 2015)

How to Be an Elephant by Katherine Roy (David Macaulay Studio, 2017)

Hurricane Watch by Melissa Stewart (HarperCollins, 2015)

If You Take Away the Otter by Susannah Buhrmann-Deever (Candlewick, 2020)

Masters of Disguise: Amazing Animal Tricksters by Rebecca L. Johnson (Millbrook Press, 2016)

Neighborhood Sharks: Hunting with the Great Whites of California's Farallon Islands by Katherine Roy (David Macaulay Studio, 2012)

Pinocchio Rex and Other Tyrannosaurs by Melissa Stewart and Steve Brusatte (HarperCollins, 2017)

Sniffer Dogs: How Dogs (and their Noses) Save the World by Nancy F. Castaldo (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014)

Snowy Owl Invasion: Tracking an Unusual Migration by Sandra Markle (Millbrook Press, 2017)

When Lunch Fights Back: Wickedly Clever Animal Defenses by Rebecca L. Johnson (Millbrook Press, 2014)

Zombie Makers: True Stories of Nature's Undead by Rebecca L. Johnson (Millbrook Press, 2012)

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