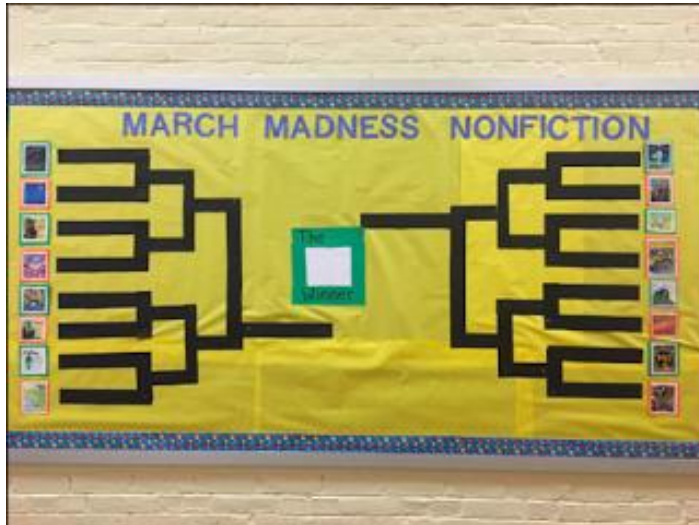
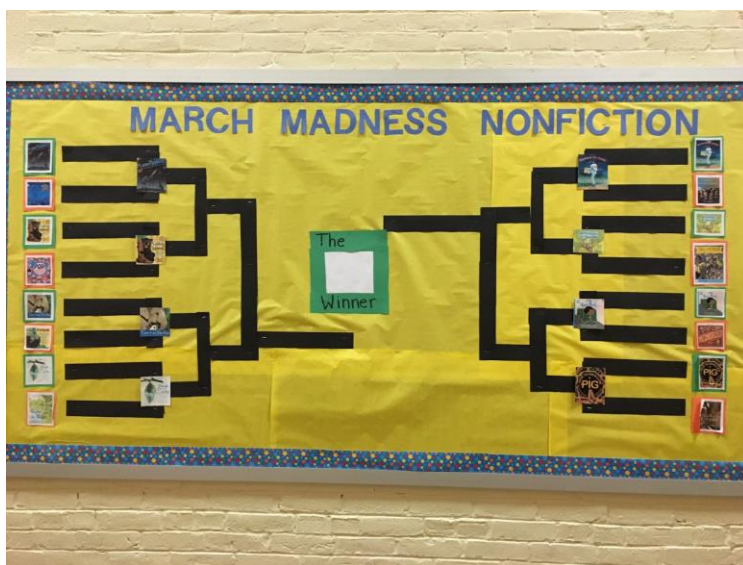


March Madness Nonfiction

Inspired by the annual March Madness basketball tournament, literacy coach Shelley Moody worked with instructional coach Valerie Glueck at Williams Elementary School in Oakland, Maine, to develop a month-long, whole-school activity in which students read sixteen nonfiction picture books (some narrative, some expository literature) and select their favorite.



During Week 1, half the classes read the eight books on the right-hand side of the board, and the other half of the school reads the eight books on the left-hand side of the board. Classrooms discuss the content and structure of the books as well as their favorite features. Then students vote on pairs of books to determine which titles will move on to The Elite Eight.



During Week 2, each class reads the four winning books on the opposite side of the board. Then students participate in rich classroom discussions and vote to select The Final Four.

During Week 3, classes spend time reviewing the four finalists and then vote for the March Madness Nonfiction Champion.

During the final week, students gather for a whole-school assembly. Following a parade of books that includes one child from each classroom, the winning book is announced. And the crowd goes wild!

What are the benefits of an activity like this?

“March Madness has not only created an energy and excitement for read aloud; it has also exposed students to more nonfiction. [It has been] a springboard for discussions of text features and structures, vocabulary and author's purpose.” –Shelly Moody, Instructional Coach

“Readers have been inspired to look up extra information about topics after read aloud.” –Fifth-grade teacher

“I like that these nonfiction books really make you think about things for a while and then sometimes your thinking changes.” –Fifth-grade student

Adapting March Madness Nonfiction



After reading about the incredible success of Williams Elementary School's March Madness Nonfiction program, Pike Elementary School in Andover, MA, decided to host a similar event at their school to build enthusiasm for an author visit with Melissa Stewart. They selected sixteen of her books and, over a one-month period, followed the process the staff at Williams School had developed. The winning book was announced on the day of Melissa's visit.

Even if an author visit isn't a possibility for your school, an author study like this one can build excitement for nonfiction reading and give students an opportunity to look closely at the writing style and craft moves on one author. Mary Kay Carson, Kelly Milner Halls, Steve Jenkins, Sandra Markle, April Pulley Sayre, and Sally M. Walker would all be good choices for this kind of activity.