



Reading Nonfiction Aloud: Tips and Tricks

I talk to lots of educators who are interested in sharing more nonfiction read alouds with their students, but they have some concerns. One question they ask me again and again is:

“How do I read nonfiction aloud in a way that engages students?”

Here’s some advice from award-winning author Nicola Davies that I just love:

Engaging Students During Read Alouds



Nicola Davis,
Celebrated UK nonfiction
author

“Reading nonfiction aloud requires a different approach. Instead of acting as a performer who must come up with different voices for each character, adults become co-discoverers.

“What a lovely thing—to explore together. It’s so empowering for children to realize that adults don’t know everything and that learning is a lifelong endeavor.”

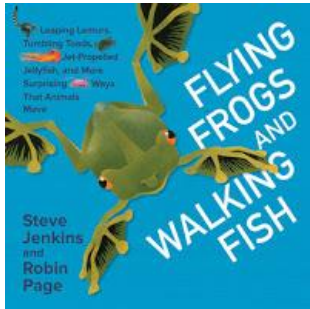
From a practical point of view, reading nonfiction picture books aloud can be a challenge because they often contain significantly more words than fiction picture books. And even if the art is enticing and the writing is engaging and the information is fascinating, a picture book read aloud shouldn’t last too long.

When I plan a nonfiction read aloud, I ask myself lots of questions.

- What parts of the book should I highlight?
- Should I skip over anything?
- Would additional visuals or props improve the audience’s experience?
- Would using a document camera help?

Sometimes I make the right decisions on the first try. But other times, the kids surprise me, and I make adjustments as I go along.

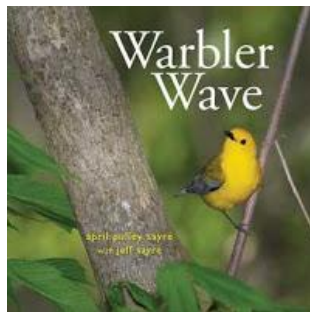
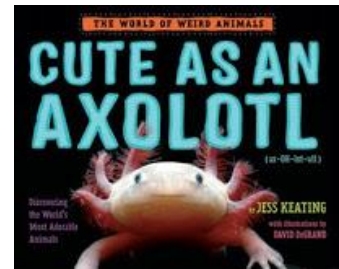
If a book is narrative nonfiction or expository literature with a sequence text structure, it usually makes sense to read the whole thing. But in expository nonfiction books with other text structures, it may be just fine to skip some parts.



In a book like *Flying Frogs and Walking Fish: Leaping Lemurs, Tumbling Toads, Jet-Propelled Jellyfish, and More Surprising Ways that Animals Move* by Steve Jenkins and Robin Page, some double-page spreads have six animal examples.

Depending on the age of your audience, that may be too much. You may want to ask a student volunteer to choose just one example for you to share with the class. Then, if children want to know more, they can read the rest of the examples themselves later.

In a book like *Cute as an Axolotl: Discovering the World's Most Adorable Animals* by Jess Keating, which has a lot of information on each page, you can share just a couple of spreads as a read aloud. As with *Flying Frogs and Walking Fish*, you can encourage interested students to read the rest of the book on their own.



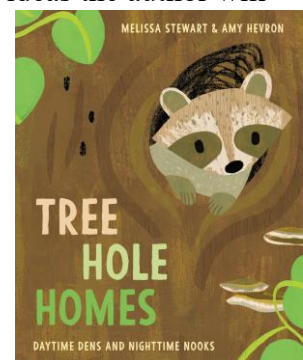
Books like *Warbler Wave* by April Pulley Sayre have a short, poetic main text with lots of interesting extra information in the backmatter. Feel free to take your time savoring the gorgeous language and stunning photographs with students. Then, as time permits, share just a few sections of the backmatter.

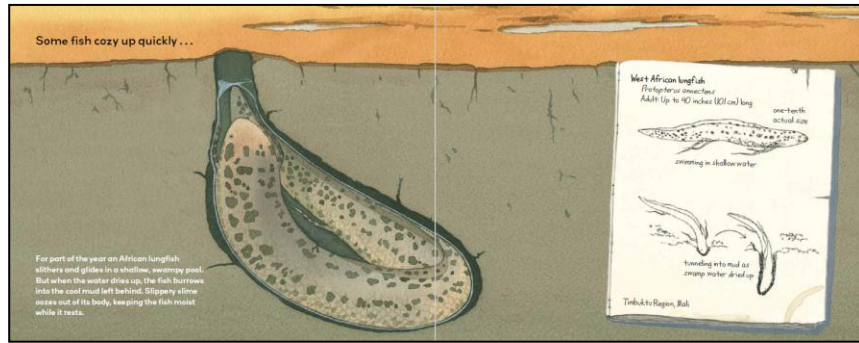
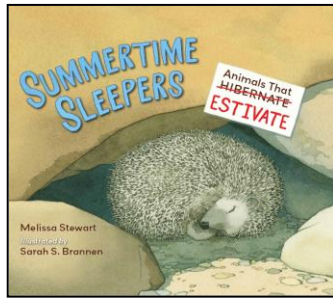
When it comes to nonfiction read alouds, there's no rule that says you have to read every single word!

During the read aloud, be sure to put expression into your reading. Be animated. Be dramatic. Show that you're eager to discover whatever fascinating facts and amazing ideas the author will reveal.

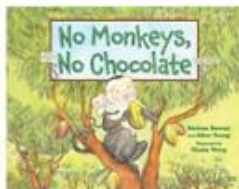
If a book has a repeated phrase, invite students to join in for a chorus each time those words appear. For example, in *A Tree Hole Home*, the words "A tree hole home can be" are repeated many times.

Sometimes props or additional visuals can approve a read aloud experience, especially if students have limited background knowledge of a topic. And a document camera can help for reading aloud books that have many different visual elements on a page. My book *Summertime Sleepers: Animals that Estivate* is a perfect example.





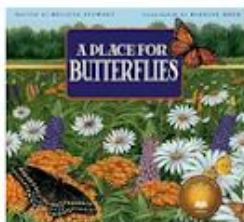
Remind students that professional nonfiction writers spend years researching, writing, and revising each book. Here's how long it took me to write some of my most popular picture books—from inspiration to publication:



6 years *Can an Aardvark Bark?*

8 years *Feathers: Not Just for Flying*

10 years *No Monkeys, No Chocolate*



5 years *A Place for Butterflies*

6 years *Seashells: More than a Home*

5 years *Under the Snow*

Encourage students to think about how passionate professional nonfiction writers must be about their topic and how motivated they must be to share information with other people to keep working on a book for so long.

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