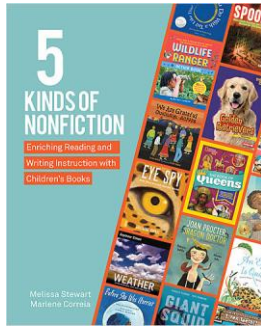


Turning Students into Passionate Nonfiction Readers



As Marlene Correia and I were writing [*5 Kinds of Nonfiction: Enriching Reading and Writing Instruction with Children's Books*](#), we discovered that most students have a clear preference for a particular category of nonfiction. For example, some love browsable books, while others would rather read narrative nonfiction.

Here's what some students told us:

"I like **browseable books** because you have a lot of choices about how you read. It's like the potluck dinners at my church." —Matthew, fourth grader

"I like **narrative nonfiction** because it has characters and a story that is a real situation! It is like I Survived and other fiction books." —Miles, second grader

"I like **expository literature** because it has facts plus it can make you think about something in a new way." —Rowan, fourth grader

"I like **active nonfiction** because it teaches you to do the things you want to do." —Gina, fourth grader

But as the following quotation shows, there's another factor that's also important:

"I like any book from any category as long as it's about sharks. That's my favorite topic." —Asher, fourth grader

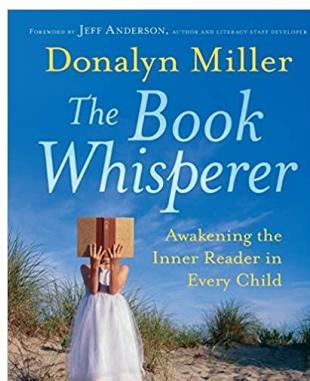
Asher isn't alone. The best way—sometimes the only way—to turn a child into a passionate nonfiction reader is to hand them a book on the exact topic they find most fascinating.

For example, a child who's captivated by monster trucks may toss aside a finely-crafted book about the history of automobiles. But they will struggle for hours to comprehend complex monster-truck stats downloaded from the internet.



Just imagine how much this child would appreciate a clear, straightforward, age-appropriate book about monster trucks. They'd gobble it up and ask for more.

That's why it's so important to identify the topics that interest your students most. To help you do that, Marlene and I created a nifty [Book Match Survey](#) for your students.



After each child has completed the survey, you can collaborate with your school librarian as well as the children's librarian in your town to create student-specific preview stacks, a strategy recommended in *The Book Whisperer* by Donalyn Miller.

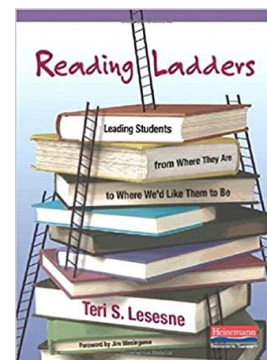
A preview stack is a collection of books that you curate for a student with their specific interests and reading level in mind. Not only can these customized stacks jump-start your students' reading lives, they can also help you understand their reading preferences as well as their strengths and weaknesses as readers in a deeper way.

You may find it especially useful to build preview stacks with one book from each of the 5 Kinds of Nonfiction and sit with students as they explore and discuss the books. Make notes about which categories intrigue students most, and use that information to recommend even more books in the future.

After students have selected and read some books, check in with them. Use what you learn to create more finely-tuned stacks. As you hand a customized preview stack to a student say something like, "I know you like books about the environment, and I remember your favorite categories are browseable and expository literature. I found these titles just for you."

This simple act will make a deep and lasting impression on the child. It will show them that honor their unique interests and that you care about their development as a reader.

As the year progresses, use reading ladders, a strategy highlighted in *Reading Ladders: Leading Students from Where They Are to Where We'd Like Them to Be* by Teri S. Lesesne, to help students gradually build their nonfiction reading skills. The *School Library Journal* article "[**Beyond Reading Levels: Choosing Nonfiction for Developing Readers**](#)" by Mary Ann Scheuer and Alyson Beecher provides excellent examples and suggestions for creating nonfiction reading ladders.



Identifying your student's reading preferences at the beginning of the school year and noting how they change and grow over time can also help tremendously as you plan instruction and make decisions about what books to add to your classroom book collection.