

5 Ways to Grow Nonfiction Readers

1. Nonfiction Read Alouds






Studies show that only 7 percent of in school-based read alouds feature nonfiction books. Many teachers say they aren't sure how to select appropriate books or read nonfiction in a way that will engage students. The [links here](#) can get you started.



2. Book Match Survey

At the beginning of each school year, many educators give their class a genre personality quiz to help students identify the kinds of fiction books they like reading most. The [Nonfiction Book Match Survey](#) can help students target the topics, writing styles, formats, and book types that will interest them and allow them to grow as readers. The survey can also help educators spot gaps in their classroom book collection.

3. Recognizing Nonfiction Book Categories

| There are different genres of nonfiction books. | | |
|---|-------------------------------|--|
|  | Active Nonfiction | Books that interactive or teach a skill. How-to books, cookbooks, science experiments, outdoor guides, craft books. |
|  | Browseable Nonfiction | Lots of pictures. Eye-catching design. Short blocks of text. "Fact-tastic" can be read cover-to-cover or jump around. |
|  | Traditional Nonfiction | Includes an overview of a topic with descriptive text structure. Often text-heavy or part of "All about" books series. |
|  | Expository Literature | Has a focused topic presented creatively. Poetry, strong voice, rich language, creative format. Not as many text features. |
|  | Narrative Nonfiction | Tells a story. Includes characters, setting, and a plot. Includes biography, memoirs and recounts of historical events. |

Once upon a time, there was just one kind of nonfiction—traditional survey books that were often a bit dry and stodgy. But nonfiction has changed dramatically in recent years, evolving into [five distinct categories \(active, browsable, traditional, expository literature, narrative\)](#).

Most students have a clear preference for a particular type of nonfiction. For example, some love browsable books, while others would rather read narrative nonfiction. Here's what some students told us:

"I like browsable 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



As students learn about the 5 different kinds of nonfiction and practice sorting books, they develop vocabulary to talk about the books they enjoyed reading and why they enjoyed it.

They also learn to predict type of information they're likely to find in a particular book and how that information will be

presented. These skills can help them identify the best kind of book for the early stages of research (traditional) vs. later stages of research (browsable) and which books make the best mentor texts for informational writing (expository literature) vs. procedural writing (active).

4. **Highlighting Available Books**

In many classrooms, teachers only share nonfiction during relevant social studies and science units, but students should have access to a wide range of nonfiction every single day. Here are some ways to encourage students to explore the fact-tastic nonfiction books in your classroom.

Nonfiction Book Displays

The key to a successful book display is drawing as much attention to it as possible and then rotating the face-out books every few days. Find opportunities to read the books aloud and discuss the content as well as the craftsmanship.

As the year progresses, invite students to form teams and create their own text sets for display. The books they choose must have something in common—a theme or concept, a text structure, a writing style, a craft move, etc. Encourage students to be creative in their choices and summarize their thinking on an index card. The teams may enjoy asking the rest of the class to guess what the books in their text set have in common.



Nonfiction Book Tasting



To expose students to a broad “menu” of nonfiction books, decorate your classroom like a restaurant and make stacks of books representing the 5 Kinds of Nonfiction. Use the Category Feature Cards [found here](#) to create signs for the nonfiction stacks. Then place the piles on tables around the classroom.

As students enter the room, divide them into small groups and invite the teams to rotate from table to table, reading each book’s title and first two pages. They should also skim through the entire book and look at the visuals. Encourage the children to make a list of books they’d like to “sample” later. Serving snacks as students move around the room can make this activity more fun.

Nonfiction Book Pass

When Colby Sharp, a fifth grade teacher in Parma, Michigan, received a \$650 grant to purchase informational books for his classroom library, he created [this video](#) explaining the Book Pass activity he designed to introduce the titles to his class. Later, he created a [second video](#) highlighting five surprising things he learned about his students as nonfiction readers during the Book Pass activity.

Nonfiction Book Talks

Chances are you’ve done book talks to share your passion for fiction books, but have you tried booktalked nonfiction? If not, now is a great time to start. [This article](#) has tips and tools to help.

As the school year progresses, you can invite students to develop their own nonfiction book talks using these [Planning a Book Talk Tip Sheets](#).



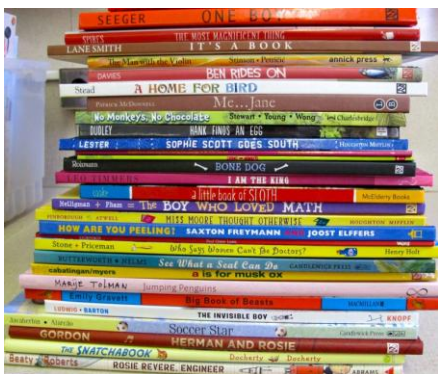
5. Sustaining Interest & Stamina

The following teaching strategies and activities can help students stay engaged in the nonfiction reading process and develop the skills necessary to comprehend and enjoy more challenging texts.

Preview Stacks

When you notice a student struggling to find books they’re passionate about, use the

results of the [Book Match Survey](#) and what you know about the child to curate a preview stack—a group of books you select with the child’s specific interests, book category preferences, and reading level in mind.



As you hand the customized stack to the student, say something like, “I know you like books about the environment, and I remember your favorite categories are browsable 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 that you understand and honor their unique interests and care about their development as a reader.

For more information about preview stacks, see *The Book Whisperer: Awakening the Inner Reader in Every Child* by Donalyn Miller and *Intervention Reinvention: A Volume-based Approach to Reading Success* by Stephanie Harvey, Annie Ward, Maggie Hoddinott, and Suzanne Carroll.

Reading Ladders

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. [This article](#) provides excellent examples and suggestions for creating nonfiction reading ladders.

Nonfiction Book Clubs

Many schools and libraries host book clubs because they encourage students to talk about reading, which enhances their comprehension and ability to navigate texts. Book clubs also give children an opportunity to practice life skills like taking turns, expressing opinions, listening to others, and working collaboratively.



But most book clubs focus on fiction. That’s a shame because many children prefer reading and sharing info-licious titles. When students read and discuss nonfiction with their peers, they learn to recognize when they don’t understand the text and develop strategies that can aid their comprehension, including re-reading, asking questions, and using a dictionary. [This link](#) provides tips for starting a nonfiction book club at your school.