

Spreading Nonfiction Joy

Nonfiction Scavenger Hunt

At the beginning of each school year, K-3 librarian Laura Beals D'Elia spends time exploring her collection with kindergarteners and first graders, so that they'll know all the different kinds of books available to them. This series of lessons culminates in a fun Nonfiction Scavenger Hunt that gives these budding readers real-life experience digging into the collection to see what's there.

“Are my readers finding nonfiction books they want to read and finding nonfiction books they didn't know they want to read?” asks Laura. “Yes! I see what readers are borrowing each week and it's A LOT of nonfiction.”



Creating a Nonfiction Playground

What's your idea of the perfect place to read nonfiction and explore the ideas and information you discover? When school librarian and children's book author Lisa Rogers asked her grade 2-5 students this question as the culminating activity of a multi-week immersion in nonfiction, the results were creative, imaginative, and fun.



[This article](#) outlines the steps of Lisa's project and shows three delightful student examples. While these students took the idea of a “playground” quite literally, no idea of what the ideal space looks like are off limits, and students can use a wide variety of art forms or media to represent it.

“This is a super easy activity that builds wayfinding skills in the library, peer relationships around books, and an exploration of individual preferences,” says Lisa.

“You could also connect the activity with a particular classroom unit, so that readers could find books within the topic that really interest them.”

The Sibert Smackdown

The Sibert Smackdown builds enthusiasm for the [Robert F. Sibert Informational Book Medal](#), which is given as part of the American Library Association's annual Youth Media Awards. Although the winning books can be picture books or middle-grade long-form titles, the Sibert Smackdown focuses on picture books because their length makes them more manageable to read and evaluate in a school setting.



Here's how it works. Students in grades 3-8 read the ten nonfiction picture books on your class's Mock Sibert list. You can select the books (some narrative, some expository literature) yourself, use the list that I post on my [blog](#) in late November, or choose titles from the [Anderson's Bookshop list](#).

After reading the titles, students choose their two favorites and use [this worksheet](#), to evaluate and compare the books before they vote. The worksheet features a kid-friendly version of the criteria used by the real Sibert committee.

The following posts describe educators' past experiences with the Sibert Smackdown, including how they modified or enhanced it. It's so important to create learning experiences that are perfect for your particular students.

[The Lowdown on Our Smackdown by Galiah Morgenstern](#)

[The Lowdown on Our Smackdown by Mandy Robek](#)

[The Low Down on Our Smackdown by Patti Francis](#)

[The Low Down on Our Smackdown by Meredith Inkeles](#)

[Sibert Book Club Shines a Light on Nonfiction by Jessica Fries-Gaither](#)

[The Lowdown on the Smackdown by Renae Nichols](#)

In some schools, students watch the livestream of the ALA Youth Media Award announcements to see which nonfiction books were selected by the Sibert committee. Just imagine the excitement when a school's winner really does receive the Sibert Medal or a Sibert Honor!

Real Reviewers!

In this activity, students in grades 3-5 have a chance to experience how much their opinions matter by writing online book reviews that can be viewed by anyone using your school district's library catalog.

To begin, gather copies of professional book review journals, such as *School Library Journal*, *Booklist*, *Publisher's Weekly*, *Kirkus Reviews*, and *The Horn Book*. Encourage students to find and read reviews of nonfiction books. They can compare these to reviews written by enthusiastic amateurs on sites like [Goodreads](#).

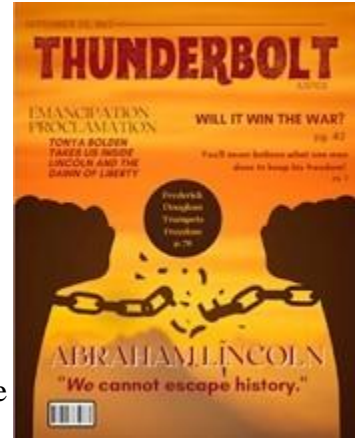
In [this article](#), she and fifth grade teacher Katie McEnaney describe the multi-week project they developed for students at their school.

Magazine Cover Book Reports

Middle school librarian Angie Manfredi collaborated with a seventh grade ELA teacher at her school to offer students [an innovative spin on the traditional book report](#).

After students read a nonfiction book of their choice, they filled out a worksheet to help them identify significant parts of their books and brainstorm ideas for representing the information visually. Then they used Canva to create magazine cover–style designs that incorporated critical content, important dates, and quotes from the book.

Students experimented with using graphics, typography, and language to interest viewers and convey ideas from the books that stood out to them. Some included QR codes on their magazine covers, linking to even more information about their books.



“I was awestruck by the variety of books students selected—cookbooks, world records, biographies, histories, books about animals, and more,” says Angie. “I saw their passion for their books in a way that centered their own voice and vision of the work. ... I know we interested students who might have turned up their noses at nonfiction, and we got them thinking about what they read in a much more active way.”

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