

## Investigating Nonfiction Like a Detective

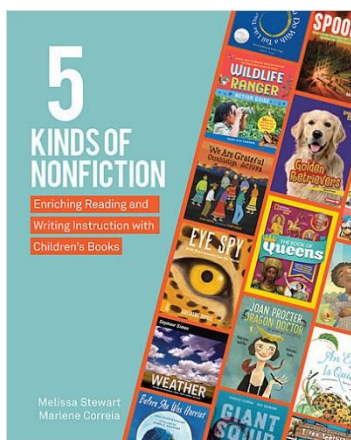
This activity was developed by Texas teacher-librarian D'Anne Dwight Mosby

My first introduction to the 5 Kinds of Nonfiction classification system came from an article in *School Library Journal* in 2018. At the time, I was working hard to build a better, more readable nonfiction collection in my library and used the system to find various kinds of reading choices within that nonfiction collection.

## 5 Kinds of Nonfiction



Fast forward to 2021, and I am in a brand-new elementary school with an incredible hand-picked collection of books and a team of highly collaborative teachers. Four grade levels on my campus are focusing on inquiry during our second nine-week term. When the third grade decided to read nonfiction for fun before choosing research topics, I was excited to help them walk through their inquiry project slowly.



To me, sharing a love of nonfiction falls under a role that I love as a librarian: Promoter of Knowledge and Critical Thinking. Of course, I want students to love to read any genre. But I also want them to get the most out of their reading, and nonfiction is written to teach us about the world and help us become critical thinkers about the world.

My goal then, was not only to promote reading, but to also promote thinking. So, I turned to what I have learned in reading the recently published book *5 Kinds of Nonfiction: Enriching Reading and Writing Instruction with Children's Books* by Melissa Stewart and Marlene Correia, to give my students a reason



Each student was given a clipboard and a chart to fill in as they went through the investigation stations. On the handout, I had created a chart of each of the kinds of nonfiction and a checklist of the kinds of text features they had studied. Each station had 5 to 6 examples of books from the 5 Kinds of Nonfiction, but all on various topics.

Students had 5 minutes per station to simply preview the evidence, looking for the way this category of nonfiction presented its information. Students found that narrative nonfiction had evidence ensconced in the story, whereas browsable nonfiction used many text features to share tidbits of “text evidence.”

Students noted what they liked or did not like about finding information in that category of book. A few students found browsable nonfiction overstimulating and preferred learning from text presented as a narrative. Some found traditional nonfiction comfortable and preferable. And many loved knowing that active nonfiction comes in an extensive range of topics—not just origami!

After investigating each nonfiction category, I gave students time to choose 3 topics of interest and look at books from that area of the library to see if they could find some in their preferred category.

**Circulation of our nonfiction books has doubled since that lesson!** And when it came time to teach students how to find database articles for research, students took their detective skills further and practiced skimming for “evidence.” Many students pointed out that even online reading fits into the five categories. The National Geographic Kids database is very browsable. Britannica Online is quite traditional. And Gale in Context leads them to articles that share information in a more literary way, such as narrative and expository literature.

I believe that identifying the kinds of nonfiction has helped my students to recognize their preferences and their own talents in reading. My students who love browsable nonfiction would have been the ones to say they don’t like reading. But now they know that reading is done in various ways and learning is an investigation.

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