

Teaching the 5 Kinds of Nonfiction

These activities, which we recommend for students in grades 3-8, can help students begin to learn the characteristics of the 5 Kinds of Nonfiction. They will also provide practical experience interacting with books from each of the categories.

Introducing the 5 Kinds of Nonfiction Children's Books

Organize students into small groups and invite each team to gather a variety of nonfiction books on a single topic from the school library. After the children have sorted the books into at least three categories that make sense to them, compare the criteria each group used.

Next, introduce the 5 Kinds of Nonfiction classification system. After sharing several books that fit each category, read aloud sections of books that are about the same topic but represent different book types. One possible text set is:

- [*Moonbird: A Year on the Wind with the Great Survivor B95*](#) by Phillip Hoose (narrative)
- [*Feathers: Not Just for Flying*](#) by Melissa Stewart (expository literature)
- [*Owls*](#) by Gail Gibbons (traditional)
- [*Eyewitness Books: Bird*](#) by David Burnie (browse-able)
- [*National Geographic Kids Bird Guide of North America*](#) by Jonathan Alderfer (active)

Ask students to compare how the books present information. Is the focus broad or narrow? What kind of text features does each book include? What kind of text structure, writing style, and craft moves does the author employ? Does the writing have a distinct voice? What similarities and differences do students notice across the categories?

Finally, send students back to the stacks to gather a selection of nonfiction books on a new topic. Invite each team to sort the books into the five types—narrative, expository literature, traditional, browse-able, and active. The Activity Cards below can serve as a helpful reminder of the characteristics of each category.

Are the students able to find examples of books for all five categories? If not, can they explain why?

Reinforcing the 5 Kinds of Nonfiction Children's Books

Remind students of the 5 kinds of nonfiction by sharing a few exemplar books from each category. Then divide the class into small groups, and encourage the teams to brainstorm a few characteristics of each type—narrative, expository literature, traditional, browse-able, and active.

Next, give each group a packet of sticky notes and three to six books from various categories. Encourage students to classify the books and label each one with a sticky note.

When all the teams have completed this task, ask each group to rotate to a different table, leaving their books behind. Students should review the books at their new table and discuss how the previous group classified

each title. If they disagree with the previous group, they should add a second sticky note explaining their rationale.

Repeat this process until each group has reviewed all the books. Then have a brief class discussion about books that have multiple sticky notes on them. Finally, ask the class to brainstorm ways that knowing these categories can help them as readers and writers.

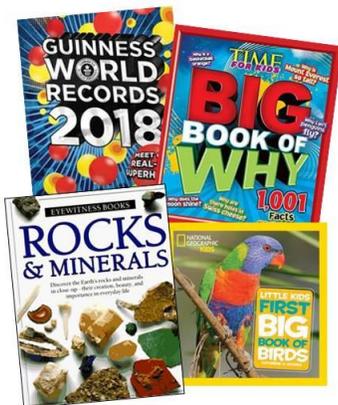
Activity Cards

Traditional Nonfiction



- Survey (all about) books
- Overview of a topic
- Part of a large series
- Clear, straightforward language
- Expository writing style
- Description text structure

Browseable Nonfiction



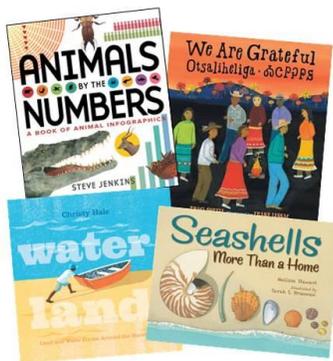
- Beautiful design, lavishly illustrated
- Short blocks of text
- Can read cover to cover or skip around
- Great for shared reading
- Expository writing style
- Description text structure

Narrative Nonfiction



- Narrative writing style
- Tells a story or conveys an experience
- Real characters, scenes, dialog, narrative arc
- Chronological sequence structure
- Ideal for biographies and historical events

Expository Literature



- Expository writing style
- Narrowly-focused topics presented creatively
- Rich, engaging language
- Strong voice
- Innovative format
- Carefully chosen text structure
- Ideal for STEM concepts

Active Nonfiction



- Inspired by maker movement
- Highly interactive and/or teach skills for engaging in activity
- Expository writing style
- How-to guides, field guides, cookbooks, craft books