

What's Blended Nonfiction?

According to the 5 Kinds of Nonfiction classification system, nonfiction books for children can be divided into five distinct categories—active, browseable, traditional, expository literature, and narrative.

5 Kinds of Nonfiction

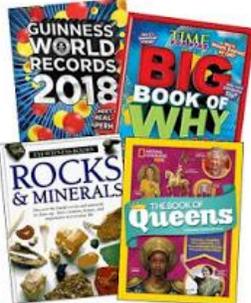


When students understand this system, they can predict the type of information they're likely to find in a particular book and how that information will be presented. As a result, they can quickly and easily identify the best books for a particular purpose (early stages of research, later stages of research, mentor texts in writing workshop, etc.) as well as the kind of nonfiction books they enjoy reading most.

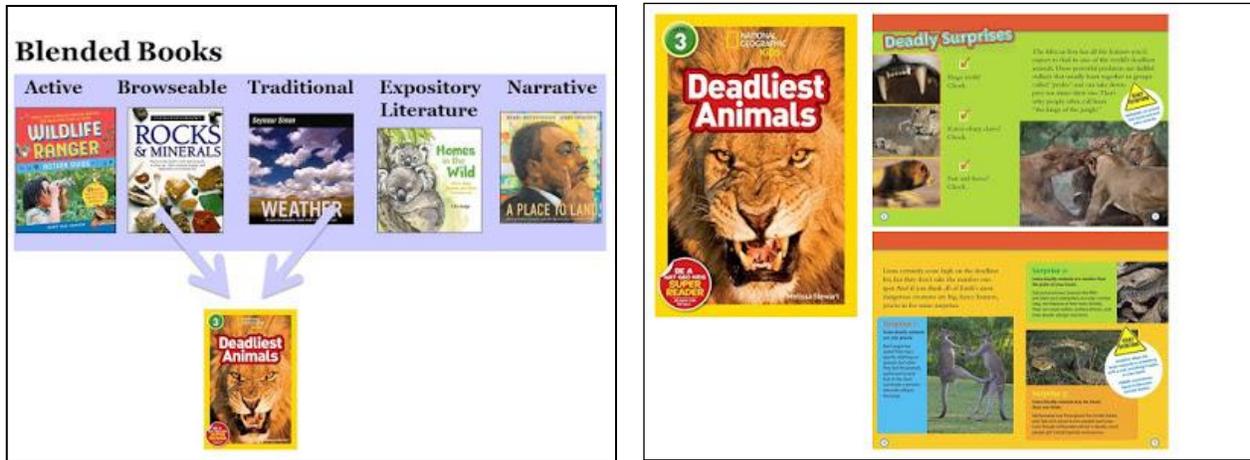
While the vast majority of nonfiction books being published today fit snugly into one of the five categories, some titles are outliers. These "blended nonfiction" books feature characteristics of two or more categories.

Browseable + Traditional

For example, books in the National Geographic Readers series blur the line between browseable nonfiction and traditional nonfiction. These titles feature a colorful, eye-catching design with

Browseable Nonfiction	Traditional Nonfiction
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eye-catching design, lavishly illustrated • Short blocks of straightforward text • Can be read cover to cover or by skipping around • Great for shared reading • Expository writing style • Description text structure <p><small>Developed by children's book author Melissa Stewart. For more information, please visit www.melissa-stewart.com</small></p>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey (all about) books • Overview of a topic • Part of a large series • Clear, straightforward language • Expository writing style • Description text structure <p><small>Developed by children's book author Melissa Stewart. For more information, please visit www.melissa-stewart.com</small></p>

plenty of photos and other text features (browseable), but the main text extends over many spreads, which makes the most appropriate for reading section by section or from cover to cover (traditional). I've written thirteen books in this series, and I can tell you from first-hand experience at school visits that kids love them.



Browseable + Expository Literature

Similarly, some books blend the characteristics generally associated with browsable nonfiction and expository literature. These titles feature a colorful, eye-catching design with such text

Browseable Nonfiction

- Eye-catching design, lavishly illustrated
- Short blocks of straightforward text
- Can be read cover to cover or by skipping around
- Great for shared reading
- Expository writing style
- Description text structure

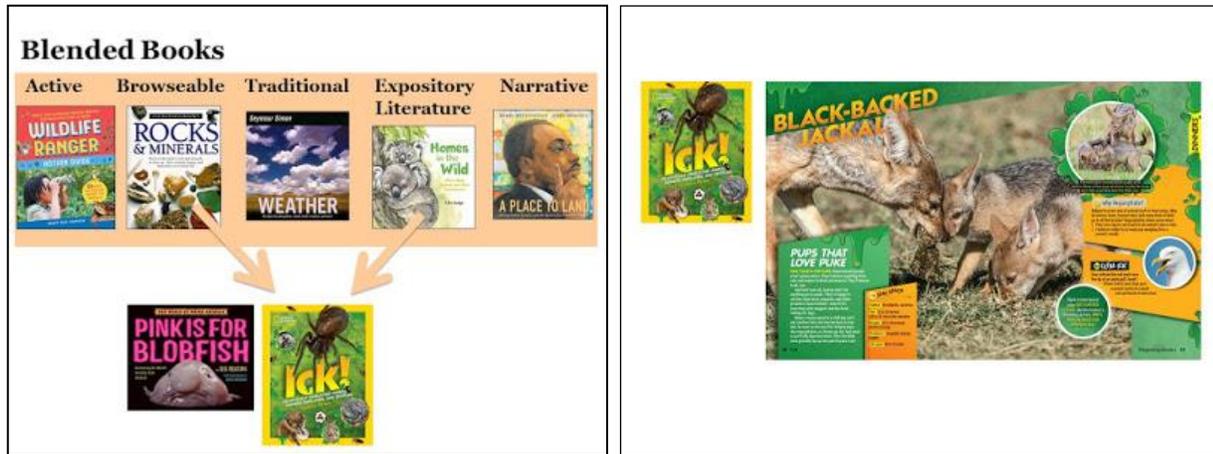
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Expository Literature

- Expository writing style
- Specialized topic presented creatively
- Strong voice and rich, engaging language
- Innovative format
- Carefully chosen text structure
- Ideal for STEM concepts

Developed by children's book author Melissa Stewart. For more information, please visit www.melissa-stewart.com

features as layered text, sidebars and factoids, photos and captions, and bulleted lists. In addition, each spread functions as a discrete unit, making it easy to skip around (browseable). But instead of providing a broad overview of a topic, these books are narrowly focused. They have a strong hook and delight readers with rich language and a strong voice (expository literature).



Jess Keating’s ground-breaking World of Weird Animals series, which includes the uber-popular title *Pink Is for Blobfish*, can be classified in this way. Another book that walks the line between browsable and expository literature is my upcoming title *Ick! Delightfully Disgusting Animal Dinners, Dwelling, and Defenses*.

Here’s a sample of the main text for a spread that describes the range of disgusting foods black-backed jackals eat on a daily basis:

Pups That Love Puke

One thing’s for sure: Black-backed jackals aren’t picky eaters. They’ll attack anything from rats and snakes to birds and insects. They’ll devour fruit, too.

And that’s not all. Jackals don’t let anything go to waste. They’re happy to eat the meat lions, leopards, and other predators leave behind—even if it’s swarming with maggots and has been rotting for days.

When a mama jackal is so full she can’t eat another bite, she hurries back to her den. As soon as she sees her hungry pups, she regurgitates, or throws up, her last meal as partially digested mush. Then the little ones greedily lap up the putrid puke. *Yum!’’*

As I wrote this passage, I worked hard to make the text lively by using strong verbs, alliteration, playful word choices, onomatopoeia, and a lighthearted, casual voice. These elements enrich the language, making it fun to read.

Narrative + Expository Literature

And some books blend the lines between narrative nonfiction and expository literature. As you probably know, books with a narrative writing style tell a story or convey an experience. They include real characters, settings, and scenes. Books with an expository writing style explain, describe, or inform in a clear, accessible fashion.

Two Nonfiction Writing Styles

Expository—describes, explains, informs



Narrative—tells a story, conveys an experience



Narrative Writing Style

Narrative scenes give readers a bird's eye view of the characters, time, and place being described.



Expository bridges link scenes, provide background, and speed through parts of story that don't require close inspection.

Nearly all narrative nonfiction includes expository bridges that transition from one scene to the next and provide necessary background information, but many expository literature titles are entirely exposition. Books that blend narrative nonfiction and expository literature contain roughly equal amounts of expository and narrative text, with authors moving seamlessly from one writing style to the other.

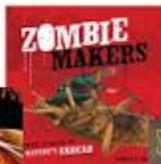
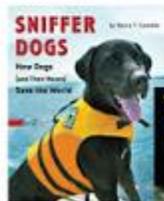
Why do I think this type of blended book is important? Because it's exactly what highly-regarded school librarian Jonathan Hunt had in mind when he coined the term "gateway nonfiction." These books have something for everyone, AND they can help all children build critical reading skills.

Blended Books

Expository Literature



Narrative



The expository sections of high-quality, high-interest blended books will captivate fact-loving kids. The clear explanations and descriptions will feel comfortable and familiar to them, giving these students the confidence and motivation to tackle the narrative sections. And once these

info-kids learn to access and enjoy narrative text, they can discover how characters—both real and imagined—exist in the world and successfully overcome challenges.

Similarly, young narrative lovers will be drawn to the story-rich sections of blended books, inspiring them to do the work necessary to digest and comprehend the expository passages. As a result, they'll be better equipped to wrangle the complex expository texts they'll encounter in middle school, high school, and college, and in their future careers.

And that brings me to what I think is one of the most important attributes of the 5 Kinds of Nonfiction classification system. When students understand the wide world of nonfiction books at their disposal, they can more easily identify the characteristics of blended nonfiction that match their natural reading preferences *and* learn to navigate the portions of the text outside their comfort zone.

Approaching nonfiction in this way puts students in the driver's seat. It helps them understand their reading strengths and challenges, and it encourages them to stretch and grow as readers.

For me, that's the end game. It's what I hope for all children . . . because before a child can become a confident, lifelong reader, they must first be able to successfully interact with a broad range of fiction and nonfiction texts.

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